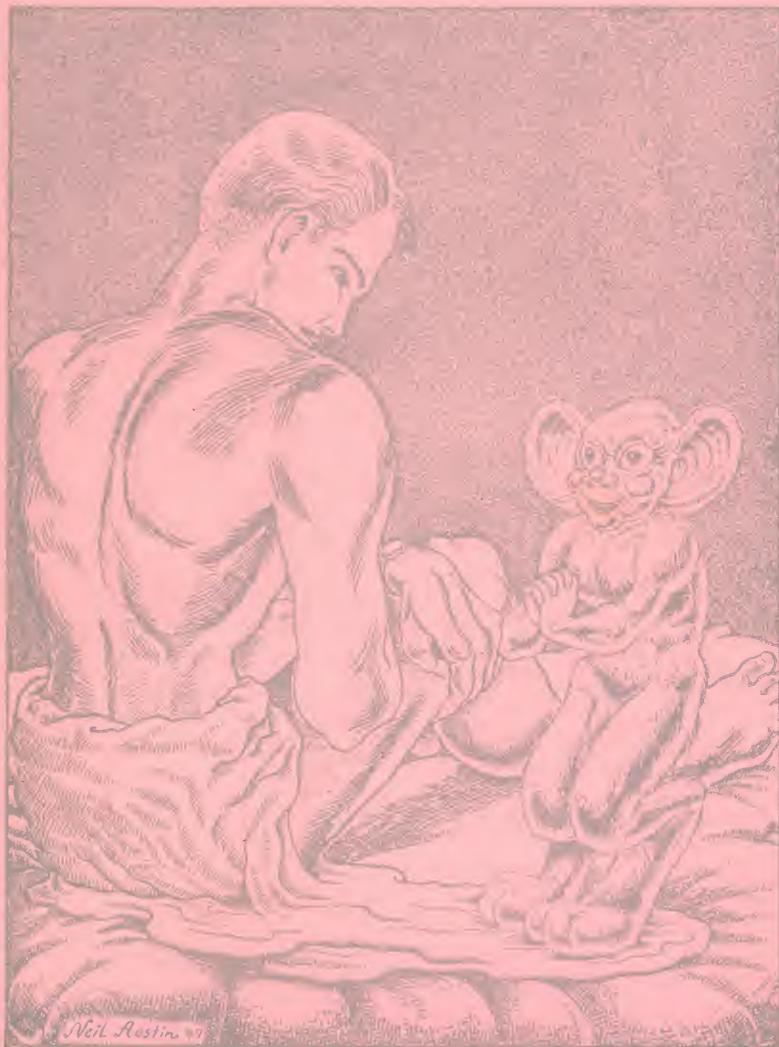


FANTASY

BOOK

No. 4



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FANTASY BOOK

VOL. 1

NUMBER 4

GARRET FORD, Editor

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Published by FANTASY PUBLISHING CO., Inc., 8318-20 Avalon Blvd.,
Los Angeles 3, Calif. Subscription price (Regular edition): \$2.50—
Deluxe edition: \$3.00—for 12 issues,

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Printed in the U. S. A.

BLACK GOLDFISH

BY JOHN TAINÉ

CHAPTER I BLACK GOLDFISH

ALPHA AND OMEGA — THE BEGINNING

and the end." Dr. Klaup wheezed softly to himself as he gazed with all of an artist's appreciation at what he considered his crowning masterpieces. Two small vials cuddled in a pink crease of his fleshy palm. One contained half a dozen perfect crystals of vitamin alpha, the other a single small crystal of vitamin omega. "Chemically pure. And I will get all the credit." Dr. Klaup slipped alpha into his vest pocket and held omega up to the light for critical inspection. "I have solved the fundamental problem of national defense."

Confident that he was the coming biochemist of the century, Klaup was feeling pleased with himself. Peering through half-closed lids at the single crystal, he softly adapted Shakespeare to the occasion, "How far that little crystal throws its beams; so shines a good deed in a naughty world. There's devil enough for a regiment in that one crystal no bigger than a pin's head. I will go down in history with Alexander the Great and Napoleon. I will —."

His daydream was interrupted by the entry of Cleo, the cook's colored assistant. Cleo's main duty was waiting on the great biochemist while he stuffed himself four times a day with more rich food than was good for his health. She gave perfect service, never so much as hinting by a suppressed sniff or a critical glance at her employer's waistline that he was fast making a pig of himself. Her predecessor, a Swedish girl with no tact, had been fired by the somewhat sensitive Klaup because she thoughtlessly picked up a button that had popped off the doctor's vest, and laid it by the side of his plate.

"Luncheon is served, sir," Cleo announced with the toneless neutrality of the well trained domestic. A feast or a funeral, it was all one to her.

"Ah," the doctor exhaled appreciatively. He put omega with alpha, smoothed the wrinkles on his bulging front, and plodded after the retreating Cleo. The prospect of beating Alexander the Great and Napoleon at their own bloody game, coupled with the immediate promise of a gorge that would have foundered a decadent Roman emperor, put the coming biochemist of the century in an unusually jovial mood. "Oh, Cleo," he called, just as she turned off to the kitchen. Halting, she stood at respectful attention.

"Yes, sir?"

"I have just thought what you remind me of," he confided with a rumbling gurgle that shook him like a nervous jelly. "That goldfish

in Walt Disney's Pinoccio. If she had been black and you blond, she would have been you and you would have been she — or her, whichever it is. This unlogical language of yours is always tying my tongue in knots. But you get what I mean?"

"Yes, sir."

She was not displeased. After all, what could be more luscious than that seductive goldfish? But Klaup, obtuse biochemist that he was, spoilt it all by carrying his joke to its logical conclusion.

"Hereafter I will — or shall, bother it, which is it? — think of you as the Black Goldfish."

"Yes, sir."

If Klaup had been as keen at analyzing human reactions as he thought he was in crystallizing chemically pure vitamins, he might have noted the instant, angry flash of outraged dignity in Cleo's really handsome eyes. It was lucky for the doctor that he and she were not instantly transported to the land of Cleo's ancestors about two hundred years before either of them was born. In her own proper time and place she would have slit his midriff like an over-ripe melon. But being deprived of her birth-right by accidents of time and place, she merely said "Yes, sir," and went into the kitchen to bring on the first round of her employer's gigantic lunch. It is doubtful if she ever heard the biochemist's clinching recollection, shouted through the kitchen door. It hatched the unassuming little pleasantries into a full-fledged mathematical theorem.

"Ha, hoop!" he rumbled, quaking in roars of mirth. "I have just remembered the name of Disney's blond goldfish. Cleo! You are Cleo, too. Hoop, hoop, hoop! Oh, ah, hoop! Perfect, perfect —."

Klaup was half way through his second stuffed duck when the doorbell rang. Cleo answered.

"Mr. Jones," she announced.

"Show him in here," the feaster sighed, fishing for a particularly appetizing chestnut in the duck's eviscerated interior. Jones did not wait to be shown. He stalked in under his own power.

"Won't you join me?" Klaup invited hospitably but none too cordially, with one eye on his caller and the other more greedily on the duck. He was not greatly alarmed for his lunch; his concern was merely the instinctive reaction of the heavy eater in the presence of superabundant rich food. Years of close association with the match-like Jones had taught him that this incessant smoker of cigars, cigarettes and pipes was not a serious threat even at a breakfast table. He was therefore shocked to his liver when Jones promptly accepted.

"Thanks, Klaup, I will," he said, carelessly dropping into a chair. "Don't have kittens," he continued in a tone of reassuring contempt, glancing at Klaup's plate. "I don't want any of your damned duck." He looked up at Cleo. "I'll take a glass of ice water and a soda cracker. Just one, please."

"Yes, sir."

"What brings you here, today?" Klaup inquired amiably. "I wasn't expecting you till Friday, and this is only Monday."

"I know you weren't. That's why I came." Lighting a vile black

stogie, the discriminating Jones thoughtfully aimed a mouthful of acrid smoke at the duck. Younger than Klaup by a good twenty years, Jones might have seemed singularly lacking in respect, or even in manners, to the casual observer. If closely questioned on his conduct, he might have confessed that he had no respect at all for Klaup. And as for manners, why, it was only decent to check them at the gate when entering a pigsty.

Jones maintained that Klaup had played him about the dirtiest trick one man of science can play another. He did not blame Klaup for stealing all the credit for vitamins alpha and omega when he was entitled to at most about a twentieth. What irked Jones was the fact that he himself had been fool enough to make it easy for Klaup to steal good ideas by leaving them around the laboratory where even a complete dub could not help seeing them. And Klaup was not exactly a dub. He was, in fact, a moderately competent biochemist of the faithful, plodding type, without a single original idea in his enormous fat head. Jones had dozens of first-rate ideas, and practically no appetite; Klaup hungered for good food and yet more good food.

In the battle for survival, nature's fittest pugilist had won. Fat Klaup owned the patents on the process for manufacturing vitamins alpha and omega. Lean Jones had merely invented the process. Klaup was in the way of making more millions than even he could ever hope to eat. Jones, as his share of the treat, might console himself with the glass of ice water and the lone soda cracker which Cleo now deftly served him. Her appearance brought Klaup's complicated joke all back to him.

"Does she remind you of anyone?" he asked, ignoring the girl's acute embarrassment.

"No," Jones answered shortly, without looking at her. He filled his lungs with smoke and sent a billowing reek directly into Klaup's face. Taken unawares, Klaup choked and dropped the duck's carcass, on which he had now begun serious work with both hands and all his teeth. "Sorry," Jones apologized, "I didn't look where I was blowing."

Purple and whooping, Klaup gesticulated for water. Cleo poured him a glass, taking her time. He finally subsided, clutched the duck, and blurted out "Black Goldfish." Then, while she stood by ready to render first aid if needed again, he gnawed at the skeleton and thickly told Jones all about his joke. "And the best of it is," he concluded, "Disney called his blond goldfish Cleo."

It was too much for the doctor. As he sat there whooping himself crimson at his joke, a second reeking billow from Jones all but finished the famous exploiter of alpha and omega. But for Cleo's expert attentions, the great Klaup might have expired without ever drawing a royalty on Jones' invention. While she lazily poured a third glass of water, Jones glanced at her face. It was expressionless, except for the eyes. Startled, he thought to himself that if anyone had ever seen hatred flame up into a potential, calculated murder, he had seen it then. He decided that Cleo would repay study.

Not till the appearance of dessert — a huge iced pudding stuffed with two pounds or more of candied fruits — did Klaup broach the purpose of Jones' unexpected call.

"Well, now that you have finished your cracker, what brings you here?"

"Have you seen this morning's papers?"

Klaup hedged. "I just glanced over the headlines. All war, as usual."

"Not quite. The public is being taught at least the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Alpha and omega. My names, you remember. Also my vitamins. Any comment? Off the record, of course."

"Now Jones, keep your perspective. I synthesized alpha and omega."

"And patented the process. While I wasn't looking, if you get what I mean. Don't forget that."

"But my dear Jones, I certainly had every right to take out patents on my own work done here in my own laboratory."

"In the laboratory you did me out of, you mean. Yes," he interrupted quickly, as Klaup began to splutter, "I know what you are going to say. I've heard it all before. I over-expanded and the peace caught me short; you lent me your hard-earned savings, the sweat of your honest brow for years and years of slaving as my assistant; and phooey — when I came to, you owned the laboratory, body, soul, and britches. I'm no financier. You were, or that fat nincompoop at the bank you used to guzzle with was. Between the pair of you, I lost my shirt. And now, if I didn't have some guts — pretty empty, sometimes — I would still be working for you as your assistant in the business you gypped me out of. I'm glad I haven't your appetite. But don't think I'm going to take it lying down. You agreed to share and share alike on the royalties. And they are going to be plenty, now that the army, the navy, the air force and all the government clerks are to be stuffed with synthetic vitamins whether they like them or not. I've come for my share of the loot."

Jones thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his threadbare pants, and sat staring in moody disgust at the fast-vanishing mountain of pudding. Klaup helped himself to a poisonous-looking slab of green citron before countering the attack.

"You brought the paper, of course?"

"What paper?"

"Our agreement to share and share alike on the royalties."

To Klaup's intense surprise, Jones nodded. In a daze, he accepted the legal document Jones handed him across the table. He was so deeply perturbed that he forgot the citron. Puffing his way through the legal jargon, he grew more and more distressed till he reached the last four lines. His face brightened. Laying the agreement aside, he resumed the important business of demolishing the pudding. Jones proffered his fountain pen, an old model guaranteed to leak automatically.

"On the dotted line, please. Cleo and the cook can sign as witnesses."

Speechless with green citron at the moment, Klaup did not reply immediately. When finally he had gulped successfully, his flabby white face became as bland as a Chinese Buddha's afflicted with congenital imbecility.

"The agreement is dated today," he observed simply. "And I failed to note my signature."

"And you already have the patents. I get the point." Jones reached for the agreement, carefully folded it, and returned it to his pocket. "That's really all I wanted. Now I can sever diplomatic relations and —."

"Declare war?" Klaup suggested with a fat smile.

"Old stuff. Wars aren't declared any more. They're fought."

"Remember," Klaup warned, "I have the law on my side."

"Between ourselves, Klaup, I don't give two hoots for the law. Not that I intend breaking any laws. You can have all the law you like. I'll get on without it."

"How?"

"By letting you eat yourself into such a silly coma you won't know which end of you is up. Then I'll shake you down for your last penny. I've seen this coming on for years. The more you eat, the fatter your head gets. Unless you cut down on the intake, you'll be as dumb as a suet pudding inside of six months. But you can't." He included Klaup and the cluttered table in a sweeping gesture of disgust. "Look at all this. And look at yourself. Why don't you take some of your own — my — vitamins? Then you could get all the vitality any human needs on a fifth of what you eat."

"But think of the pleasure I would — should — miss. Eating, my dear Jones, is the finest of the fine arts. Vitamins are for the poor slaves who can't afford a normal balanced diet. Look at all this, you say. Well, look at it. Is anything missing? Only what I ate before you came in. Put it all together, and you have the perfect diet, as natural and as delicately balanced as the solar system. No, Jones, vitamins are not for I — I mean me."

"All right, all right. You're only making it easier for me. I'll give you six months to finish yourself. Then I'll take over again."

"We will see."

"Shall see, Klaup. Your mind is slipping faster and faster. Five years ago your English was perfect. Nobody would have recognized you as the refugee I fished out of the gutter. Fame and fortune are yours, Klaup. Long — six months — may you continue to enjoy the spoils of victory. Then you'll be just another refugee again."

Something in Jones' calm contempt stung the famous and fortunate Klaup to a heated retort.

"I was never a refugee!" he blabbered.

"Not technically. You're right. But you came over here to get away from all the shooting before it really started. Your noble self-sacrifice in giving up a mediocre job to preserve your high ideals got the right people interested. In me, worse luck. Wouldn't I give a martyr to liberty a chance? I did, and you took me for a long, long ride. Now I've started to walk back."

"I am afraid," Klaup remarked judiciously, "you are going to have a rather long walk." Pleased with this joke, he reduced it as usual to a mathematical theorem. "If P and Q are any two points in space, the shortest distance from P to Q is equal to the shortest distance from Q to P. You started from P and proceeded to Q. You are now at Q and wish to arrive at P in the shortest possible time. It will take you as long as the journey from P to Q."

"Six months, Klaup. No more, no less. Don't forget."

"And how do you propose to travel, may I ask?"

"Like you. On my stomach."

"I don't follow."

"No? Ever hear of the way an army travels? On its stomach. I'm going to enlist, if they'll have me. It should be easy, with the enemy concentrating only five hundred miles south of the border. Men will be needed in the medical corps. I'm good enough for that."

"Too good, I should say. But first you will have three months of rather stupid drill in camp. Then they may give a man with your experience a job of sterilizing syringes for some second lieutenant in the army medical corps shooting Wassermann into the bad little boys. Unless," he continued with a sly smile, "you plan to peddle vitamins to the generals?"

"I had thought of that before I saw the papers this morning," Jones admitted. "But as your company — my company, by rights — has already signed the contracts for feeding vitamins to all conscripts and government employees, I don't see much chance of selling anything to the generals and the admirals." He paused, critically inspecting the flabby face across the table. "By the way, Klaup," he continued when he had finished his scrutiny, "you are getting so fat I hardly trust you to have told the authorities what is what about alpha and omega. It would be just too bad for all of us if you should slip up on the job. Now that we are talking turkey, exactly what did you tell the authorities to buy? Alpha, or omega?"

"Omega, of course," Klaup replied, but none too certainly. "That was right, wasn't it?"

"Check. Omega is what the boys need to fill them full of pep and vinegar. Sure you didn't recommend alpha?"

Klaup's expansive jowls drooped in sudden distress. "I think so," he faltered.

"Better check that at once, before the feeding begins."

"If you will excuse me a minute, I will. Try one of those meringues. They're stuffed with queen olives and maraschino cherries."

"No thanks. If I need anything, I'll take a pill of omega. Better get the Surgeon General direct on the wire and talk to him personally. Say it's urgent and immediate. It is."

As fast as he could waddle, Klaup padded to his private laboratory to telephone. The instant Jones heard the door close behind his former assistant, he pressed the buzzer for Cleo. She appeared with suspicious promptness. Jones suspected her of eavesdropping. He wasted no words.

"Want to do something worthwhile for your country and make a little money on the side?"

Cleo looked doubtful. She was nobody's fool, in spite of her black skin or perhaps because of it. She gave a hesitant assent.

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Listen hard and get this down cold." Jones drew half a handful of tiny white pills from his coat pocket. "Put one of these

in Dr. Klaup's coffee every morning. They have no taste and he won't notice anything."

She shook her head doubtfully. Plainly she was scared. Jones reassured her by swallowing six of the pills.

"Look. They're not poison. I could down the lot and feel none the worse. These are vitamin pills — good for the health. I take them regularly myself every morning. Dr. Klaup eats far too much. If he gets his vitamins every day, he will want to cut down on his food. That will be all to the good. The doctor is a very valuable man. The country needs him now, and is going to need him worse in the next six months. His health must be kept at top-notch, and these pills are the only way of doing it. You see? By taking care of him you will be fighting for your country."

She still looked doubtful, and Jones redoubled his sales talk. "Dr. Klaup is worth more to us than a whole army. Everything depends on him — army, navy, air force, diplomacy, everything. So you must give him a pill in his coffee every morning. Do this for the country, and I'll guarantee that the government will set you up in business for yourself. How about you and the cook starting a catering business of your own? With all her experience cooking for Dr. Klaup and your brains you could clean up. Pretty good, isn't it? Now it won't matter if you make a mistake once in a while and give the doctor a dozen of these pills instead of just one. The effect is the same. But one is enough, and these pills cost money. Don't waste any if you can help. I'll see that you get all you need. Here, stretch out your hand."

She did so, reluctantly. He poured the pills into her cupped palm.

"I can count on you?"

"Yes, sir. They aren't poison?"

"No, no. I've just told you exactly what they are. You have brains. Use them for your own good and the country's. We shall need everything we've got if the enemy crosses the border. And I happen to know they're planning the invasion for six months from now. Use your head. Dr. Klaup's health must be preserved."

Cleo seemed to be filled with a holy awe. But she was also impressed and flattered at the prospect of becoming the savior of her country. The appeal to her brains had won her over. She knew Jones as well as any servant can ever know a casual visitor of her employer's, and she not only respected but rather liked him. His offhand, indifferent manner, without a trace of familiarity or patronizing, was exactly right in her eyes. And now Mr. Jones had revealed himself as a singularly penetrating judge of character. Others, including numerous white folk, had complimented her sincerely on her exceptional appearance — a famous artist had told her he would pay her generously to pose as a Nubian slave girl in his intended masterpiece; but Mr. Jones was the first to see beneath the surface of things. Nobody had ever told her before that she had brains. Her opinion of Mr. Jones' intelligence rose high.

Under the spell of his high-pressure sales talk, Cleo felt safe as Mr. Jones' collaborator. He would not ask her to poison Klaup, but only, somehow, to make life unpleasant for him. This suited her perfectly. Alone with Klaup on a desert island, she would gladly have fed him

poisonous mussels. But as a prisoner of conventional society, she must follow the civilized rules and avoid the police. At a warning nod from Jones, she slipped the pills into her apron pocket and began clearing the table. Klaup entered the room to find Jones staring gloomily out of the window, and Cleo going noiselessly about her official business.

"I was right," he puffed. "I had told them omega."

"So I thought," Jones replied nonchalantly.

"Then why the devil did you make me go to all the bother of telephoning?"

"Just to prove to you that you are slipping. Badly. You weren't sure in your own mind what you had told the Surgeon General. If you had been sure of yourself, would you have telephoned? Of course you wouldn't. I've proved my point."

"I don't see it."

"You don't? It's plain enough. You need me here to keep you straight."

"You can come back as my assistant any time you like. I shall even double your salary."

"Not good enough. Fifty-fifty on the royalties. That or nothing. Sign this agreement, and I'll call off the war."

For a moment Klaup seemed tempted to accept. But the prospect of sharing millions was an anguish greater than he could face. If there had been only a few hundred thousand at stake, he might have given in. But millions, no. It was impossible.

"You have no case. The patents are in my name."

"All right. You've turned down my final offer. Well, I'm off."

"Where to?" In spite of his brave front, Klaup felt vaguely uneasy.

"To enlist. There's a first-class war coming, you know. So long. I'll drop in on you from time to time if they give me leave. Good luck with my vitamins."

He slammed the door and was gone, leaving Klaup pasty and shaking.

CHAPTER II BAITED AND SET

DUSK FOUND JONES TRUDGING

wearily along a deserted country road a good hundred and fifty miles from Klaup's laboratory. He had walked the last ten. Not a farmhouse or squatter's shack was in sight, and the exhausted fields, uncultivated for decades, rolled drearily away to the darkening horizon. Far to the south the black crests of a barren mountain range marked the international border. Less than half a thousand miles behind that range, if the army intelligence could be believed, the enemy had been concentrating his fully mechanized army of invasion for the past ten months. When would he strike? This month, next year, never?

Technically at peace with all its neighbors, each people eyed the other suspiciously, speculating which would jump the gun and hurl fifty or sixty thousand planes over the mountains. Cities of several hundred thousand, and two of over a million, lay less than four hours — as a jet bomber flies — from the border. Although not technically at war

with its neighbor to the south, the northern country openly spoke of the foreign masses of armed men below the border as 'the enemy.' If not declared enemies of their northerly neighbors, they were enemies of all but a few of the other nations of the world, having conquered or terrorized most of them in record time. It seemed fairly obvious to the military experts who was next on the program.

"Ideal landing field for parachute troops and their baby tanks," Jones thought disgustedly as he viewed the sombre landscape. "And transport planes could dump a full motorcycle division anywhere around here in a single night. I'll bet there's not a gun emplacement or a trench within ten miles. Not enough cover for a jack rabbit between here and the mountains. Why don't we drop a bomb on them? Oh well, the hell with it. I've got troubles enough of my own. Let somebody else tell the army how to run its business."

Half a mile farther on he sat down at the side of the road. It was now dark. There was no moon. He sat perfectly still, listening. After about ten minutes his patience was rewarded by the faint hum of a motor. Using his eyes as well as his ears, he located the source of the sound as a dazzling planet was blacked out for an instant. Springing to his feet he ran as fast as he could into the field behind him.

He had judged his directions and distance well. The huge bomber came to rest less than fifty yards from where he had stopped. In the dim starlight the giant plane loomed up on the treeless plain like a stranded battleship. No lights showed. Jones started running; only to be frozen in his tracks by a shouted challenge.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Eight-seven-J."

"Advance, Eight-seven-J."

On reaching the plane, Jones was hoisted aboard by two privates. The officer in command gave the order to take off, and the huge black bird swooped down the level runway. No accident had selected that particular spot in thousands of empty square miles for a landing in the dark.

Shortly after midnight Jones was shown into the Surgeon General's office at army headquarters. Instead of the frayed civilian suit he had worn when he boarded the bomber, a private's uniform now lent his gangling frame a slight touch of military distinction.

"Salute, private Jones!" the Surgeon General snapped from behind his desk.

The three men eyeing the new recruit smothered their grins as Jones, with all the grace of an imperfectly trained seal, flapped his right flipper to his face.

"Practice that," the Surgeon General ordered, "when you are alone. Be seated, Mr. Jones. This gentlemen," he nodded to a rather stupid-looking man in civilian clothes, "is from the army intelligence, and this gentleman," indicating the other, in uniform, "is Major Evans of the medical corps. You will be under his orders when any third party is present. Major Evans is technically in charge of the work in vitamins. He will be entirely responsible to you for all such work, and you will be responsible to me. Colonel Gregory here will keep you informed on

all matters pertaining to vitamins that may be discovered by the intelligence departments of the army, navy, and air force. Is everything clear?"

Jones nodded. "Yes. But to keep things straight, I'll check. Major Evans is just window-dressing for the public and any snoopers who may drop in. I'm to have full charge of vitamin administration, and all controls from now on are to be under my direction. Major Evans is to transmit my instructions to the men concerned, and I am to stay out of the picture, public or official, altogether. Now about Colonel Gregory. Can his department promise fairly regular reports on what the enemy is doing south of the border?"

The Colonel spoke for himself. "You will be furnished with full weekly reports on what you want." He glanced inquiringly at the Surgeon General. "Shall I proceed with the first report?"

"A summary will do."

"Very well. Our future allies continue to tighten their blockade of all enemy ports. The enemy is suffering a severe shortage of essential foods. The occupied territory is unproductive. Manufactured substitutes for fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables are proving increasingly unsatisfactory. The troops are seriously undernourished. There is a steady rise in diseases caused by vitamin deficiency and a general lowering of morale among all the fighting forces. Unless the situation is remedied, the enemy will be totally unfit for combat in six months, possibly less."

"Your men are in a position to observe any improvement if it occurs?" Jones asked.

Colonel Gregory allowed himself a smile at civilian Jones' innocence. "If any are not in a position to see what is going on, others will replace them within sixty hours. Just last week they executed four of our representatives before the fifth got a short-wave through on the enemy's substitute for potatoes."

"And it wasn't of much importance when we got it," the Surgeon General remarked drily.

"Maybe so," Colonel Gregory retorted; "but it was an order, and it cost four of our best men to get what you wanted. Shall I report on Klaup?"

"Yes. Mr. Jones will want to hear that. Better give the complete record to date."

In spite of their best efforts, the intelligence department had found nothing in Klaup's history that would justify them in separating him from his royalties for the manufacture of vitamins. The coming biochemist of the century appeared to be exactly what he had always represented himself to be, an emigrant from a country whose domestic politics he had disliked. In his native land he had enjoyed a mediocre success as a professor of biochemistry in an obscure university, and later as an assistant to the chief biochemist of an internationally famous drug company.

During the first World War, Klaup had suffered from malnutrition. In this he was no more unfortunate than the majority of his compatriots. But unlike them, he resolved never to endure another enforced restriction of diet. He, for one, would be deaf to all promises of redemption for his despairing people; and while they might die for freedom if they chose, he would live to eat. At the first hint of an approaching storm,

he would leave the martyrs to face it while he fled to the nearest land where a man might count on at least three meals a day. Klaup did not love his country less; he merely loved his dinner more.

The storm broke in due season. Although he was eating only one meal a day at the time in his land of refuge, Klaup felt that he had lost nothing by decamping. Presently, to his great surprise, he was adopted by no less than four patriotic societies devoted to the preservation of liberty and freedom throughout the world. So great was his popularity in the totally unexpected role of a martyr for freedom that he found himself stuffing away not three, but six, heavy meals a day.

Like a bedraggled tomcat rescued from starvation, Klaup began to purr and assert his imagined rights under the constant stimulation of rich food and warm shelter. Proclaiming that he had been a great biochemist in his own country, the heroic Dr. Klaup all but demanded adequate recognition for his outstanding abilities. Reduced to its lowest terms, Klaup's price for his services to the cause of world freedom was a first-rate job at good pay with not much to do in a going concern of international standing. If the world at large did not owe the great doctor a living, the land of his adoption did, and he was there to collect it.

The Vesuvius Drug and Chemical Laboratories, owned and operated by Jones, suited the exacting martyr perfectly. The Jones Laboratories were famous even in Dr. Klaup's native land. Unluckily for Jones, he himself was equally well known to several dozen of Klaup's influential new friends. Some had even borrowed money from him after the great crash left them flat. To keep his sanity from being squeezed out of him by pressure groups on all sides at once, Jones gave Klaup a job as his technical assistant in biochemistry. Klaup proved himself conscientious, greedy, hard-working, and entirely commonplace in his science.

Shortly before the second world war broke, Klaup began having attacks of what he called conscience, but which Jones diagnosed as gas on the stomach from gluttony. Klaup complained from time to time of the treatment his old friends at home were getting under the upstart government. Ought he not to have stayed with them, to share their sufferings? "You ought," Jones informed him curtly. "Then you wouldn't have been here." Klaup, he could see plainly enough, was offended by his tone. Well, Jones asked himself, what of it? He was to learn very shortly, when it was to late to apologize for his abruptness.

When the war ended and the peace really got into its stride, the Vesuvius Chemical and Drug Laboratories began to experience grave financial difficulties. Jones' foreign markets vanished, and the domestic uptake was insufficient to balance the heavy losses. Being a great admirer of the late Mr. Henry Ford, Jones followed that astute individualist in keeping clear of banks. He would have preferred to borrow half a million from the devil before asking a banker for the loan of a penny. And that, in fact, is pretty much what he actually did. When Klaup came forward with his savings in a particularly desperate emergency, Jones accepted the offer and gave a note in return. Business would improve in a month or two, and he could take up the note.

Business did not improve. Deeper than ever in the hole when the note fell due, Jones accepted another loan. Then he woke up with a

jolt. How had that fathead Klaup managed to save so much out of his salary? The answer was shockingly simple. He hadn't. But his good friends who had high-pressured him into his job had other good friends with an abundance of idle capital. For a major slice of the pie, they were only too glad to advise Dr. Klaup in his financial manipulations. They had never liked Jones very well anyway, especially after he had stood them up on their feet again after the crash. Jones accepted an assistantship in the Klaup Drug and Chemical Products Corporation, formerly the Vesuvius Chemical and Drug Laboratories, without a whimper. If he had been soft enough to let a fat fool like Klaup skin him out of his pants, it was not his turn to cry. He kept his head, held his tongue, and resolved to get back his business if he had to make mincemeat of Klaup in the process. Knowing that Klaup had mostly wind and water in his head, Jones waited confidently for his chance. It came sooner than he had hoped. The war had ended so unexpectedly that expatriates who ordinarily would have been discretion itself, lost their heads and began bragging as if they themselves had won all the spectacular victories.

Klaup was early among the most boastful. Although he set everybody's back up with his fatuous superiority, nothing could be done to put him in his proper place. He was a naturalized citizen of his chosen country, and as such was free to say what he pleased. Jones swallowed hard and encouraged his chief to ever wilder extravagances of dumb admiration and noisy adulation. To hear Klaup sounding off, one would have thought that his former compatriots were the first people in history to win a battle.

Estimating Klaup's stupidity with mathematical precision, Jones added just the right encouragement here, and the nicely calculated warning there, to lead his dupe to the edge of the precipice. Then he pushed him over. It was all done with such devilish expertness that Klaup would not know he was falling till he struck bottom with a world-shattering smack.

The push which shoved Klaup over was an adroit appeal to the great biochemist's vanity. The smashing victories of Klaup's former compatriots, Jones argued, were conclusive proof that Klaup's people were destined to conquer, civilize, and rule the world from pole to icy pole. What nation on earth, or what combination of nations, could hope to stand up against their all-conquering superiority? As for Jones himself, if he had his say, he would advise his own people to throw in the sponge at once, before even entering the ring. They would be knocked out cold in the first round unless they showed a little common sense and bargained while the bargaining was good. Klaup agreed, swelling like a toad with borrowed pride. Jones knew then that he had his man. At the first opportunity, Klaup would board the band wagon and lead the victory parade.

With fiendish ingenuity Jones threw a perfectly luscious opportunity right at Klaup's feet. But the great man was so dumb that the tempter had to work like seven devils to make his victim see what he had only to pick up to become the hero of his people. Persistence won, and Klaup finally grasped vitamins alpha and omega in his flabby right

hand. Jones had done his work so expertly that Klaup believed with all his soul that he had synthesized alpha and omega by his own undirected efforts. Jones knew better. His beautifully simple trap was finished and baited. He could almost see his victim blundering into it already. All that remained to complete the destruction of Klaup was to present the trap to the proper authorities.

They received it at first skeptically, as the unpractical dream of a man slightly unbalanced by financial reserves. They began to take an interest when Jones explained that personal revenge came first with him. It was their business, not his, to protect the country against aggression. Other scientists and crackpots volunteering their unsolicited services always insisted that with them the safety of their country was everything and personal gain or notoriety a negative quantity. This man Jones, they decided, was at least unusual. They would do him the courtesy of examining his plan. They did.

They inspected his trap minutely and found it exceedingly beautiful in every detail. Jones would have his revenge; they would have the enemy. But, like many beautiful things, the trap was delicate and required expert handling if its exquisite fragility was not to be ruined by clumsy fingers. Knowing that there is no patience on earth like that of a good hater with a flaming grudge in his heart, the authorities appointed Jones himself to supervise the planting of his trap. He would not bungle.

Jones was already familiar with nearly all the facts in Klaup's career when he presented his trap to the authorities. But to leave no possible escape unblocked, he had asked the Surgeon General to get a thorough check-up from the intelligence department. Colonel Gregory's report supplied the few missing details. To his surprise, Jones learned that Klaup's own account of his career in his mother land agreed with that uncovered by the intelligence operatives. It was plain that Klaup had nothing to hide but his stupidity and he was too stupid to hide that. More than ever the tempter felt confident of success.

"What did you make of Klaup's urgent telephone call yesterday about one o'clock?" he asked the Surgeon General.

"Oh, so you were behind that. I was just going to ask you what it meant."

"I dropped in on Klaup partly with that call in view. You have always rather doubted my claim that Klaup knows next to nothing about alpha and omega, haven't you?"

"I still do," the Surgeon General admitted quite bluntly.

"Well," Jones continued, "that call proved my case. It took me less than ten minutes to stand Klaup on his head. It is a fact that he wasn't sure which one of alpha and omega he had recommended to the government. Better yet, he had no idea which of the two he should have recommended. If Klaup were the biochemist you still seem to think he is, could he have muffed a play like that?"

"I suppose not. Still, he might. What is your opinion, Major Evans?"

"If Klaup is confused on what the whole vitamin program is about,

how can he know anything? I agree with Mr. Jones. As a biochemist the man is merely a fairly competent cook."

"So you agree with me," Jones persisted, "that he could never have synthesized those vitamins unless I had practically done the job for him?"

"Of course. And a very good job it was, too. The government plant has been turning out vitamins by the half ton lot ever since you gave us the green light ten months ago."

Jones grinned appreciatively. "So you could get along without the Klaup Drug and Chemical Products Corporation in an emergency if you had to? And do Klaup out of his royalties?"

"We might, but we shan't try. Klaup has a contract with the government, you know."

"Don't I know it? And Klaup also is suffering from the delusion that his vitamins, to be fed wholesale to the armed forces and government employees beginning next Monday at breakfast, are the first on the market. By the way, how are the controls reacting?"

"As you predicted. Right on schedule."

"That raises another question," the Surgeon General interposed. "Are you quite certain Klaup is ignorant of the army tests?"

"Quite. All he knows is what happened to the rabbits and guinea pigs. I ran all those experiments myself, and only let Klaup look on. To make sure he was too dumb to understand anything, I gave him a crate of standardized white rats to play with. The man knows as much about biology as I know about the Kingdom of Heaven. He couldn't stick a needle into a pillow. The rats sized him up the first shot. He never got a drop of alpha or omega into one of them. But he did accumulate one of the finest collections of rat bites I ever hope to see."

"And to think," Colonel Gregory mused, "that the safety of our democracy is in the hands of a man like that."

"It is sad, but true," the Surgeon General sighed. "No wonder the democracies are fighting for their lives."

"Stop!" Jones begged, "or you'll make me cry. Now it's my turn to bring tears to your eyes before I get some sleep. I want twenty-five thousand in gold coin."

"You do? What for?"

"As a slight reward to Dr. Klaup's Black Goldfish for distinguished services to her country in time of desperate need. She and the doctor's cook plan to open up a chain of delicatessen stores or something of the sort, I believe, six months from now."

"Black goldfish? You had better go to bed. The altitude on a fast flight sometimes makes me rather light-headed myself. It wears off with sleep."

"Presently. But let me explain my goldfish. She is the only great discovery Klaup ever made for me." Jones gave them a detailed account of his transaction with Cleo, concluding with a word of modest praise for himself. "You see, I grasp my opportunities. Seize the occasion; that's the first rule of sound tactics. Could I possibly have hit on a neater method of fattening Klaup for the killing? Not that I take any credit. Klaup practically begged me to do it, and Cleo was only too

willing to help. All things work to the good of those who love their work."

The Surgeon General shoved a paper at him.

"Make out a requisition."

CHAPTER III ROAST PIG

THE HISTORIC MONDAY MORNING WHEN all government employees, civil and military, got their first official vitamin feeding was enlivened by a special breakfast radio program. Soldiers, sailors, aviators, workers on farms and mechanics in thousands of factories, ground crews, engineers of all grades, government clerks and stenographers, cabinet members and even the executive head of the nation himself, slumped their fortified mush or crunched their revitalized toast to the martial strains of a symphony orchestra broadcasting patriotic themes over a national hook-up. To accompany the bacon and eggs, a leading composer had concocted a catchy melody to fit the inspired lyrics of the nation's most popular poet. From the moment this lilting tune burst upon the astonished breakfasters from a full-throated choir of five thousand voices, male, female, and neuter, it was a smash hit. The difficulty of finding an acceptable rhyme for omega injected the one sour note in an otherwise harmonious program.

Behind all this apparent tomfoolery was a deadly serious purpose. The nation was facing the gravest crisis in its history. Why greet it with solemn words and long faces? To anyone who knew the people the answer was obvious. It puzzled the enemy. From the lofty heights of his cultural superiority he condescended to lecture the devil-may-care breakfasters for their lack of solemnity. He promised them a full and fitting correction for their levity. They should be civilized, and he would civilize them.

The program ended with a moving address by the world-famous bio-chemist, Dr. Klaup, to whose genius the happy breakfasters owed the buoyant health and bounding vitality that were so shortly to be theirs. Klaup had no more attentive listeners than Jones and the Surgeon General. They had breakfasted an hour ahead of the scheduled time, and so were able to give Klaup's effort their whole attention.

"Members of the radio audience, ladies and gentlemen," Klaup began in the accepted style. "May I claim your indulgence for a few moments on this historic occasion? Please do not let my remarks interrupt the breakfast of any loyal worker for national defense. It is your duty to your country to eat all you can, when you can. And I know I may safely promise each and every one of you that what you are now eating, and what you shall eat in the future, will do more good than all you have eaten in the past. For your food is fortified with vitamin omega. And it will continue to be fortified with vitamin omega. Our government has done me the great honor to accept one of my inventions and to apply it as an essential aid in national defense."

"Damn liar," Jones muttered under his breath. "He knows he stole omega from me. He —."

The Surgeon General nudged him into silence as Klaup inhaled noisily and plodded into the second lap of his oration.

"It would be presumptuous of me to thank the government for this supreme recognition of my unworthy efforts. In placing my talents as a biochemist at the service of my adopted country, I was only doing my simple duty, as each and every one of you is gladly doing his or her duty in the national emergency enmeshing us all."

"Who wrote his speech for him?" Jones whispered. "He never heard 'enmeshing' from me. Do you suppose Cleo helped him? The whole thing has a suspiciously African tone. Just what a colored preacher —"

"Shut up, you idiot! I want to listen. He may say something yet."

"I saw my duty and I did it," they heard Klaup declare.

"You mean," Jones corrected, "you seen it and you done it. Even money the next is 'as each and every one of you'—"

"Shut up!"

"—sees and does his duty or her duty," Klaup finished for Jones. "But if you will pardon a personal allusion, I have a double obligation, from which the vast majority of you are free, for doing my duty to my country. You were born in this happy land. I was not. Until my mature manhood I enjoyed no such privileges of liberty as you have taken for granted ever since you first saw the light of day. Perhaps for that very reason I prize my citizenship in our great democracy more highly than some of you can realize. For the inestimable boon of fellowship in your free society of rugged industrialists I tendered the offer of all my skill to my adopted country in the hour of its greatest need."

"Don't forget to mention the royalties," Jones interjected hastily, dodging the Surgeon General's toe. "All right; I'll let him finish this time."

"As some of my listeners may not be enrolled in the national defense program, I feel it is only right that those present excluded from the vitamin feeding should have a special word of encouragement. First I would say, Do not despair; omega will be yours too in due time. But so urgent is the national emergency that all vitamin omega manufactured by the Klaup Drug and Chemical Products Corporation must go directly to the armed forces and government employees, and to them alone. Although the loyal workers of my Corporation are straining every nerve and working overtime — without additional pay, let me note in passing — they are barely able to meet the essential demand. But I can assure you that with the passing of the emergency, omega will be within reach of each and every citizen of our democracy, from the humblest toiler in the sanitary corps to the chief executive in his palatial mansion."

"What vistas of peace, prosperity, abounding energy and increased productivity open up before us with that simple promise! The benefits of food fortification with vitamin omega will be felt by future generations long after the present crisis is passed. But let us not roast our ducks — pardon the slip, I meant chickens — before they are plucked, as your wise proverb has it. To be worthy of peace and democracy we must be prepared to defend ourselves against aggression. And to defend ourselves, we must be strong, alert, healthy, intelligent. How are these ends to be attained? I believe the answer is clear from what I have already said. But to leave no cake — pardon me again, please, I meant stone —

uneaten — pardon, unturned, I shall briefly summarize the celery — pardon again, please — salient croquets — I mean characteristics.

"Vitamin omega can make its greatest contribution to our national defense preparations by providing freedom from fatigue, capacity for work under high pressure and a feeling of well being. Let omega lift your spirits as high as heaven, for there is no let-down after omega. If I may drop into the vernacular we all understand and love for a moment, I may say that a vitamin jag is the only jag without a hangover. A katzen without a jammer, as one might put it. Without the ability to overcome fatigue, to work five times as hard and twice as long as usual, to feel on top of the world twenty-four hours a day, our nation could not hope to rise to its emergency. This ability, I assure you, was at stake until our government fortified your breakfast, your dinner, and your supper, with vitamin omega. Now we can face the future with confidence, putting our hands to the task before us with renewed energy, and trusting science to see us through to victory. My special method of vitamin fortification will give the most buoyant health and spirits to aviators and others active in the nation's defense who are subject to unusual strains.

"And now, a short glance into the golden future that awaits us all. This fortification in the happy days to come will restore the use of bread to the dinner tables of our undernourished democracy. Think of the accompanying boon to millers and the boost to farmers! Hand in hand, smiling as they come, science and technology advance, to dedicate themselves to helping the farmer. By increasing bread consumption only two slices daily per person, the wheat consumption of our populous democracy could be increased by some five thousand tons daily! It is a vision to ah-yeo-aw-haw — pardon me, to aw-yawh — but I must yaah-haw — stop, aah-yaw-haaw!"

Jones looked startled. "What on earth was that?"

The Surgeon General diagnosed the extraordinary sequence of noises terminating Klaup's oration as a series of yawns.

"His, do you suppose?" Jones asked in alarm.

"They couldn't very well have been the announcer's."

Jones sprang to his feet. "I must have a plane at once. Anything fast will do." He began tearing off his private's uniform. "Where in hell did they put my clothes?"

While the Surgeon General telephoned for a fast plane, Jones dashed to his own quarters and scrambled into his civilian suit. Back in the office, he dived for the sample packages of vitamin omega on the Surgeon General's desk and began cramming his pockets.

"See you late tonight or early tomorrow morning," he said, as he tumbled into the car that was to take him to the landing field. "Major Evans has the schedules for the controls."

It was long past the famous biochemist's lunch hour when Cleo answered the doorbell, to find a flustered Mr. Jones confronting her.

"Is Dr. Klaup in?"

"Yes sir. But he is lying down."

"Asleep?"

"I think I heard him snoring as I came along the hall, sir."

Jones tiptoed in. "Don't disturb him," he whispered. "The doctor must get his rest. He must be very tired after his broadcast this morning. Is the cook in the kitchen?"

"No sir. She doesn't come down till five."

"All right, then. I can talk to you in the kitchen."

Cleo looked guilty even before Jones began his questions. By coaxing and flattery he finally got her to show him her remaining stock of vitamin omega. He was prepared for a jolt but not for such a shock as the seven tiny pellets on Cleo's dusky carmine palm gave him. He managed to control his voice.

"You gave him the rest?"

"Yes, sir. You said it wouldn't matter if I slipped and gave him more than one."

"I know. But half a handful, that's too much of a good thing. Sure you just slipped, Cleo?"

"You said these pills aren't poison, sir."

"They aren't. They're just awfully expensive. A handful won't do anyone any real harm. It's just like taking too many cough drops. One clears your throat and makes you feel fine. What happens if you swallow a pound? Why, you feel loggy. All that medicine has done you no good. You see how it is?"

"Yes sir."

"Sure you do. You've got brains. Now, just between ourselves, why did you give Dr. Klaup all those pills? And how did you get them down him, if it isn't a trade secret?"

Cleo giggled, a rich, mellow giggle. "He had stuffed suckling pig for dinner last night, sir; and when cook was called to the service porch to see if the pheasants for tonight were all right, I mixed the pills with the stuffing. She hadn't quite finished stirring it."

Jones simulated wondering admiration. "Well, if that wasn't ingenious. I couldn't have thought of a better way myself. But tell me, what made you think of doing it in the first place?"

Her whole manner and bearing changed. The look in her eyes made Jones silently thank his stars that Klaup, not he, was the target of her hate. She was no longer a servant, to submerge her personality in the petty routine of her employer's household, but a human being whose primitive sense of dignity had been wantonly outraged.

"He kept calling me Black Goldfish."

Jones noted that she had dropped the 'sir' in addressing him. It was time to come to terms.

"Fine. Now we are talking man to man — or woman to man, if you like. First, I respect your feelings in regard to Dr. Klaup. I'm going to put all my cards on the table, to show that I trust you. You must play straight with me, too. I don't like Dr. Klaup any better than you do. But I'm not going to get either of us into trouble by making him sick. That's not the game at all. If a white man's word of honor means anything to you, I give you mine that both of us will have our revenge if you do exactly as I tell you. Follow the directions I gave you yesterday, and I promise that in six months you can laugh in Dr. Klaup's face and call him any names you like. I meant it when I said you have brains. But

I am more disappointed than I can say that you didn't use them about that stuffed pig — and I don't mean Dr. Klaup. Will you tell me straight what you thought you were doing and why you did it? This is strictly between ourselves."

Troubled and confused, she struggled for words to express motives and instinctive, illogical acts she had probably never before given conscious thought. Now that she searched her memory in an effort to give an honest answer, she could find nothing that made any sense. Completely baffled, she did the best she could, knowing that she was incapable of anything better.

"I tried to kill him without killing him."

Jones nodded. "I think I see. You wanted to put him out in such a way that nobody would ever know you had done it, and you thought you could. What made you think that?"

"What you said about the pills. You told me a slip wouldn't matter."

"Anything else? Come on; we're not hiding anything this time."

"I saw that you hated Dr. Klaup."

"Pretty strong, and not exactly true. I don't hate him. I despise him. But I wouldn't kill him even if I knew nobody would ever find out I had. All I want is to get even with him and make him give me back what he swindled me out of. I shan't do him any injury. I shall merely make such a fool of him that if he has any brains at all he will blow them out. Putting it crudely that way scares you a bit, doesn't it? Well, your attempt to poison him when you thought it was safe has scared me stiff. I sized you up pretty well, but not that well. Now, take your time to answer. Do you really want to kill him?"

"No." She hesitated. "But I can make him sorry for calling me Black Goldfish?"

"You can make him very sorry."

"By doing what you told me yesterday?"

"Yes. On my word of honor. This is straight talk. One thing in what I told you wasn't. Can you guess what it was?"

"Those pills aren't expensive."

"You'll do. They're about as cheap to manufacture as whole wheat flour. Do you believe what I have been telling you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind the 'sir'. We are still talking man to man. One pill every morning in the doctor's coffee for the next six months, no more, no less. If you had studied biology at school, I could explain why. The doctor is what the biologists call a control. It's like this. Suppose some scientist wants to try out a new medicine, and doesn't know whether it is any good or not. Say it is a remedy for colds. He collects a thousand people with colds, gives five hundred of them the medicine, and gives the others nothing. If the ones that take the medicine recover much faster than the others, he knows that his medicine is pretty good. But if they all get better about the same time, he pours the stuff down the sink and forgets it. You follow?"

"Yes."

"Dr Klaup is just the right type for a perfect control on vitamins. If vitamins can cut down an appetite like his and still leave him full of

pep, they are just what our armed forces need. The doctor is the best test case in the country. But if you cut down his appetite too quickly by giving him heavy overdoses he may stop working altogether. Now here is your supply for the next six months we are running the control experiment. I can really count on you this time?"

"Yes," she promised, taking the sample packages.

"Then don't expect to see me again till about six months from now. A very influential friend of mine will probably send for you then. What I told you yesterday about doing something big for your country was straight. It is still good. And so is the promise of a reward. You will have earned it. Any questions before I leave?"

"Shall I tell the doctor you called?"

"Good idea. Say I called to congratulate him on that magnificent speech he made over the radio this morning. By the way, who helped him write it?"

"The cook."

"Oh. That explains a lot. Well, goodbye, and good luck, Cleo."

"Goodbye, and good luck, Mr. Jones."

To Be Concluded



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

We are aware that the inordinate length of time which has been elapsing between issues of FANTASY BOOK has lost us much good will and support.

However, the explanation is very simple: Prior to the publication of FB#1 the publishers had contacted a national distributor to handle the magazine. By the time the first issue was printed the distributor (the only national distributor on the West Coast) had suffered a business failure, and we were caught with a large supply of FANTASY BOOK #1. Since then we have developed some new outlets, but, as yet, only a fraction of what is needed to make FB into a major publication.

Due to this reversal of plans we have had to concentrate on the production and distribution of cloth-bound books, sustaining FANTASY BOOK as best we could.

We thank all our friends for their patience — and assure you we are doing our utmost to solve the difficulties surrounding FB publication.

In the meantime, you will doubtlessly see many changes as FANTASY BOOK evolves and matures.

The Staff

SONGS of the SPACEWAYS

UNIVERSE BOUND

Long silver ships, prisoned by air,
Earthbound, and striving to fly;
Held by the bonds of the atmosphere
Trapped by the shell of the sky.
Why should they linger on planet's crust?
Wings they were given, indeed;
Universe prowlers, the lot of them,
Haunting the highways of speed.
By-passing a sun, and kissing a star,
Thundering rockets aflame.
These are the ships that make the fleet,
Ships that will live in fame.
Loosen their ties, and then let them go
Roaring out into space.
Unleash their shackles and let them fly.
See how they're striving to race.
Fasten the wings of a bird in flight,
Cripple a racing steed,
Earth-bind the ships that were meant for the stars
Forbidding the space they need.
Each one tip-tilted, pointing to space;
Now they are roaring their blast.
Silver ships fleeing into the void,
Universe-bound at last.

— L. Major Reynolds

SECRET OF THE SUN

They thunder out of the stratosphere, the Men who are
Tomorrow,
Smiling down with pity on the beasts that roam the earth;
They have found the secret that will banish fear and sorrow,
They have solved the mystery surrounding death and birth.
They have found the master race — or rather, they have
found us;
They've no need for armor, they are the Ultimate Wise;
And burning out of the Outer Space their space-ships now
surround us —
Fair as a maid and stronger than him who holds the skies.
They thunder out of the stratosphere, and all eternity with them,
The supermen who beat us back without a sword or gun —
For their hearts are fired and their souls are timed by a strange
celestial rhythm,
As they march to test the final worth of the secret of the sun.

— Edsel Ford

THE EMIGRANT

Through misty eons, and through time-lost age,
There has been welling in the heart of man
The urge to seek far shores, and to assuage
This inner urgency since he began.
To conquer seas and stone compels the more
The spirit's restlessness to higher reach
Beyond the boundaries man knew before,
Until the skies and earth deny their breach.
Intrepid, the unchartered ways he sails,
To mark his emblem on the mauve unknown;
Above, the stratosphere with stronger trails
Is beckoning the soul, the soul alone.
Our clay-bound wings wait only to unite
With cosmic realms from which they first took flight.

— Vera L. Eckert.

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WALL OF DARKNESS

BY BASIL WELLS

THE WALL OF THE SOUTH ROOM ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE HOUSE caught my attention that first day. The faded floral design of the paper that covered its blankness was lumpy with underlying layers of older paper, squares of cloth, and inexpertly applied patches of plaster.

Elderly Mrs. Gaspee, who had died a few months before, had used the room for nothing but storage — why I couldn't imagine. It was the old half of the house; tiny panes of glass, exposed varnished beams of walnut and oak, and narrow deep shelves built into the east and west walls.

I called it to the real estate agent's attention, and he laughed, rather too heartily I thought, at my curiosity.

"Mrs. Gaspee was a peculiar person," he said. "She never used this room and permitted no one to enter it. Said it was unhealthy."

He showed a mechanically perfect set of uppers in what was supposed to be a winning smile, and cleared his throat. He was always grinning, clearing his throat, or blinking his prominent yellowish eyes . . . The rasping out of his throat was unconscious habit.

"A little plaster, Mr. Borton," he said, "or a new partition of plasterboard." *Rasp.* "Yes, I would advise a partition." *Rasp.* "A wonderful room. Yes, wonderful!" *Rasp.*

Half an hour later, despite the real estate agent, we had purchased the quaint little house. One of the peculiar things about it was the fact that one half of it was purely New England — out here in Ohio — and the other half was a substantial but poor copy of the other section.

It was three months after we moved the twelve miles from Kennard Junction before I found a man willing to plaster and paint the front room. The village of Enselm had lost all its handymen and carpenters to nearby warplants, and as yet, although the war was ended, none of them had returned.

Only by chance had I learned that a farmer named Renwood Peters, a wrinkled, short, skinny-limbed man with a surprisingly big stomach, spent his rainy days plastering and papering for his neighbors.

So the first rainy day in late May, on a Thursday, Peters' Model A sedan grunted into the yard and stalled a couple of feet from our front porch. Peters dumped his plastering trowels, stepladders and other gear on the freshly painted porch — Vivian

had applied the final coat just four days before — and pushed open the front door.

"Where at am I to work?" he asked.

I showed him the south room. "I intend to make this our library and my work room," I told him. "I'm getting tired of pounding a typewriter on the kitchen table."

"Igad," snorted Renwood Peters, rubbing his protruding middle, "you ain't gettin' me to work on that wall. No sir. Not me. Mrs. Gaspee never done no more than stick more paper on the wall."

"But," I said, puzzled, "I'm not Mrs. Gaspee. I want the wall restored — smoothed up and patched where it requires repair."

"Heh," grunted Peters shortly. "She had reasons for not messin' around with that wall. Last man tried patchin' a hole in it died. Died right by that window a-clawin' panes of glass loose. His skin was raw as steak, and his clothes was like dust."

"And how long ago was this?" I asked, fighting back the impulse to laugh. "You remember it?"

"Igad no! 'Twas after the war of 1812. Old Herrod Enselm had built this big place . . . Herrod was a devil — his folks was all like that — witches and such so they was kicked out of New England years before . . .

"Fired off all his help. They was green lights and blue lights back of the shutters and ungodly screechin's. Then one mornin' Herrod didn't come out to the barn for his milk jug. And they found him — so!"

"That happened right here?" I inquired, scratching down a few notes. Maybe *Werewolf Tales* would be interested.

"Igad no! Maybe a mile down the pike. Past the Ransom house, that's the stone place, on top of a knoll. Won't no grass grow there, only toadstools and such."

I laughed. "Then this room couldn't be part of that place." I tucked my notebook away.

Renwood Peters' lined old face twisted as he ventured a dry chuckle.

"Igad yes it could. Herrod's niece, what married a Todd, had the house broke up in four chunks . . . Nobody'd rent the big place or go near it. And so this's one of the wings moved here."

I shrugged. "Then you won't repair the wall for me?"

"Get me some two-by-twos," Peters told me, "and some lath or plasterboard. I'll put another wall up there for you."

"And cover up the grain of those two beams?" I argued. "They're walnut and they're flush with the plaster as it is now. A partition would hide them."

Renwood Peters shrugged bent shoulders beneath the faded blue paleness of his wamus. He set to work reloading his equipment in the car's back seat. Having finished this he turned to me, his dried apple of a face serious.

"Now don't you go tearin' at that wall," he warned. "Paste on some cloth strips and put on paper. But don't be rippin' off no plaster."

And with that he drove off.

The next Sunday afternoon was warm and sunny. I had told Vivian of the old farmer's wild story about our house being haunted or accursed and we had even drafted a tentative plot, between us, that used the death of Herrod as its central macabre theme.

And so we drove out past Ransom's stone-walled farmhouse to the knoll where Herrod Enselm's old dwelling had once stood.

We found the depression that had once been a cellar about a hundred feet back from the highway. I was puzzled at the absence of grass around the rim of the hole and in its uneven bottom. There were fungi, unhealthy-looking colored growths: red, brown, tan and a foul shade of corpse-like white. And there was also a scattering of sickly brown-leaved growth, a snaky, waxen vine with dull red tendrils rooting from each meager leafy joint.

"It is foul!" gasped Vivian, pressing her handkerchief to her nostrils. "Like a — forgotten grave!"

And, despite the sunlight and the fresh spring breeze, I too felt a giddiness stealing over my senses as the full impact of the acrid stench of the shallow pit reached me. I laughed, hollowly, and, since I had come here to explore the ruins, jumped down into the ancient hollow of the Enselm cellar.

A powdery dark dust, feathery as ashes and yet heavier, covered the pit. I tore up a length of the strange vine with the brown leaves, thinking to discover what manner of ugly growth it was, and as quickly dropped it again. A thousand minute thorny needles projected almost invisibly from the snaking vine's sleek length.

And as I stepped back my leg brushed the edge of a small pile of recently-cut brush that someone had thrown into the depression. The leaves were yet attached, though withered, to the branches.

I felt the contact and then I saw, with a fraction of my vision, that the little heap of brush was dissolving — crumbling into a powdery dark dust like that already coating the old cellar's depths!

Hurriedly I scrambled out of the place, my breath strangely tight and my heart hammering. That there was some explanation for the strange appearance of the depression I felt sure — poisonous fumes from some underground rift perhaps — but I had lost my desire to probe more into the possibly deadly nature of them.

We drove glumly back to our home and I smeared the throbbing little pinpricks of the vine with iodine. As for the smears of the dark powdery dust they clung like tar to my flesh and only a liberal dosing with kerosene carried them away.

My trousers were ruined too, apparently a thousand moths had been working on them. More and more I was convinced that some sort of acid, probably in suspension in the air, was responsible.

"Vivian," I told my wife angrily, "I'm not going to let this get under my skin! Even if those fumes once killed a man out there on the knoll they'll be harmless here."

"I'm going to lay the ghost of old Herrod Enselm by tearing off that paper and patching the wall!"

Vivian's dark blue eyes widened in her heart-shaped fair-skinned

face. She put her arms around me and when she kissed me her long dark hair blotted out the sunlight momentarily.

"Not today, dear," she chided. "This is Sunday. You know how it is in a small town. The neighbors will talk."

I stood up abruptly, almost letting Vivian tumble from my lap.

"Right now," I insisted. "Forget the neighbors for once. I'm not waiting any longer to get that room finished."

The tableknives that we were using to strip away the loose sections of wallpaper were old bone-handled ones we had found in a forgotten nailed-up cupboard. We tore away great sections of paper, eight — ten — twelve layers of flowered, spotted and striped paper. The floor was littered with it.

"Must be getting along toward night," I said once, frowning at the increasing dusk. "I was hoping we'd be finished by seven."

Vivian held up her wrist watch. It was only five o'clock and outside the small-paned windows the sunlight was bright as ever.

An unusually thick lump of paper resisted my dull blade. I pried at it . . . and it came away with a triangular chunk of plaster, at least a square foot in all, attached to it.

Vivian screamed and started to run from the room.

Pouring from the opening was a flood of inky formless blackness. Out into the room it rolled slowly but steadily. It built into a dense wall of moving black blankness that slowly expanded itself.

I backed away. The same acrid evil stench that I had scented at the site of Herrod's old homestead was growing stronger with every passing second. And there was a muttered vibrant humming of all-but-inaudible sound that proceeded from the heart of the outward-spreading pall. The sound steadily grew louder.

I pushed out into the other room, a growing sense of helplessness oppressing my senses. I was beginning to realize that I was face-to-face with something that high school or college physics was unable to explain. Somehow old Herrod Enselm had come across an evil force or a hellish living substance — perhaps from another dimensional plane or another world — and this wall had been his sealed gateway between. Apparently only plaster, or the lime in the plaster, served to hold this weird darkness at bay.

The rattle of loose metal and the final chug of an engine from the driveway made me turn from my stunned inspection of the expanding night that was swallowing the room's interior. It was Renwood Peters, his prominent middle bulging through the unbuttoned front of his vest.

"Got worryin' about that wall," he began. I pulled him inside.

"Igad!" he said explosively, peering into the room, "you done it all right, son! Yep. That's what Herrod was sealing off that time, only enough of it got through to finish him off. Then it brisked out the window maybe."

"You mean that hole has to be closed again?" I said. "Why not knock out the window and let it escape?"

Renwood Peters wrinkled up his withered forehead and his sharp old eyes snapped. His old bow tie came off.

"If that hole ain't closed," he said, "no tellin' what's comin'. Maybe they ain't no end to that black. Wouldn't take many years to roof off the sunshine. Then where'd we be?" He was taking off his coat, folding it carefully across the back of our big chair.

"And the stuff eats skin and cloth and wood. Old Herrod Enselm's clothes fell right off him. Igad, we can't let it go loose!"

He ran out the door to his car. His tools were in the back seat and he hurriedly got them out. I ran for the pail to get water for him to mix with the dry plaster. He worked hastily, making a stiff mixture of moist whiteness in his coated metal mixing tray.

Then he dipped his shirt in the pail of water and tied it over his face. I did the same. He took his tools and I carried the prepared dough of plaster. We plunged into the room.

Darkness was complete. We groped across to the wall and I put down the loaded panful of plaster. I fumbled for the electric switch, found it, but there was no glimmer of light in the inky blackness. Light could not penetrate that oily thickening absence of anything but substance!

I became conscious of the intensified prickling of my body. I knew what it was, the devilish material sucking the very flesh from my body. I could hear nothing, but my fingers found Renwood Peters' arm and I could feel him slapping plaster madly against the cavity in the wall.

He slumped down at last. My own lungs were burning and my throat was raw. Every breath was torment. I ran my hand over the damp triangle in the wall. Closed completely!

I dragged Peters from the room, out into the blessed sunlight of the Sunday afternoon. I saw his clothes were falling from his bent old body as though they were rotten, and through the tattered garments his flesh showed raw and red as though it were sunburned or blasted by a desert sandstorm.

Nor was I in any better case . . .

That is why, today, there are no exposed polished beams of native wood in my study. Instead there are two sturdy partitions of wood and plaster, one built before the other, and next to the old wall a third layer of plasterboard makes yet more secure the gateway barred against the darkness.

Mankind and the darkness must never meet again . . .



DWELLERS IN THE DUST

BY FORREST J. ACKERMAN

NONSENSE; they're dead; What you say is the same as that there's an eternity of every moment."

"As there surely is, John; as there surely is!" George Romani had trapped me into arguing with him again about his pet hobby: Chronportation. Talking time-travel with George was practically tantamount to creating perpetual motion of the jaw, and I should have known better. But, no; I plunged in where angels would have feared to tread with all the saints in heaven rooting for them.

"An eternity of every moment," George continued. "As Dunne put it: *Nothing dies*. The people of the past are alive and living now. The men and women of all ages—cave-men to our brave new world—are loving and hating, working and playing, fighting and dying. Every great battle is being fought right now—back in time past. Columbus is sailing, Jeanne D'Arc is burning, and—"

"Pasteur is pasteurizing, I suppose! So, these long-departed—these corpses—these *dwellers in the dust* are doing all that!" I snorted. There is a certain exasperating quality to my snort that always has a telling effect on George: He starts telling me what a fool I am, in language which the law of 1949 does not allow in print. Now the Anglo-Saxon renaissance of 1955—but I am anticipating my story.

"Exactly!" George flamed like a Bunsen burner. "Just as you and I. To the people of the future, *we* are the dwellers in the dust, as you put it."

This was too much. "So now there are people of the future! And I suppose they are dust, too, even though they aren't born yet?"

"Yes!" hissed George. "And everything isn't so funny to me, you dusty devil. Come along!" And he grasped my shoulder and dragged me protesting from my chair and amber cheer toward his laboratory.

Romani's experimental lab was clean and white and ordered. No sloppy sinks, no chemical stinks. The lady from Good Housekeeping would certainly have given him her Gold Medal seal of approval.

On the broad translucent table in the center of the lab reposed a contraption I had not seen before. Like nothing so much, it was, as a stereopticon—the "magic lantern" predecessor of the moving picture.

"My time-machine," George explained succinctly, continuing facetiously, "You've heard of the concept, I presume. The original story was reprinted widely shortly after the demise of Wells, its conceotor. John, this is it—what I've been working on to prove my theories. Father Time permitting, you are looking at the first 'tempot'."

I made no comment for the moment; walked over to the table and stared at the device. Small and ineffectual-looking in appearance, it scarcely seemed creditable that it could contain the magic capable of transporting a person across the mysterious gap of Time.

I glanced at my curvex. "George," I said, "according to my wrist model time-machine, it's time to retire if this tinker toy is all you've dragged me in here to see. Really, your sense of humor is about as funny as a malignant tumor!"

"And your simile is as inelegant as an elephant," he chided me. "But

I am completely serious. That's a time-machine. Only, we don't ride it—we turn it on us. A ray."

"A ray. Hoo-ray. As for turning it on *us...*"

"Look here! I've already experimented with the chron-ray on myself, John, It really works. I've gone into the past. It occurred to me you might like to accompany me. That sis of yours—the tragedy that makes you drink so much..."

Lorie! Instantly I was sobered. Little sister Lorie: I thought of her crumpled body, once vibrant with life; her blue face, blue as her eyes from which the light had gone. If only there had been some way I could have prevented her— How many times I had longed to turn back the clock. Now—what was this George was saying, was saying could be done?

A trip into the past?

"George! You *would* take me back? That thing really could send me back two years? You could do that—now? There's no danger, no possibility of injury from the ray? And I—we—would come back?" I was clutching at a wild hope—a god-like hope—an opportunity to change the past.

For answer my friend silently drew up two chairs before the ray-projector.

"Sit down, John. I can and will take you back. Now if you like. Back two years. There will be *no* danger"—I did not catch the import of his emphasis, then—"no possibility of injury. And we will come back."

I sank onto the chair, my mind a maelstrom. The alcoholic fog had cleared, but fear of the unknown clouded my brain.

George sat beside me. "Back 26 months, isn't it? What location?"

"You can adjust that too? Then make it just outside the York Hotel. Where the Jolson Theatre is today."

George's artistic hand reached out to the table, and a firm finger clicked a toggle on the instrument that faced us—the machine of destiny that was to erase 800 days since the death of my sister Lorie.

"That would be about 19 February 1949, right? In front of the York." And a brilliant orange ray leapt squarely at us from the lens.

There was absolutely no period of transition. No sickening sensation, no wrenching, no mad melange of night melting into day in reverse. George and I simply stood before the hotel, which had not yet been destroyed by the block-square conflagration.

We stood on a crowded sidewalk; automatically, I moved back out of the way of pedestrians. George followed to my side.

"Well?" His enthusiasm was as boyish as a teen-ager, for all his 38 years.

I simply stared dumbly, another thing I do well. The people's clothing, I noted dully as men and women swarmed by, was just beginning to reflect the sartorial revolution to come in the summer of '49. A few pioneering "donnes"^{*} beneath their cello-furs were wearing the "pneumonia neckline". the sartorial nova of the summer of '46 which died a-borning after a smidge of sensationalistic publicity in the press but came back like a boomerang two years later. Another season, I knew, would see men emancipated from those traditional tyrants of the throat, neckties.

A mauve cravat emerged from the York, expertly tied at the soft throat of the suavest blackguard that ever took a girl off guard. Krebs! Tony Krebs. Anthony C. B. Krebs, the 3rd.

* After Laurel Lee Donne, cinemactress who blazed the trail in the Lang film, "Satellite Stowaway".

George did not know this carrion by sight: Krebs had vanished on a round-the-world tour after what had happened to my sister, and I had not met George until after Lorie was dead. But I had told him the whole sordid story, and cursed—in several languages—this millionaire Machiavelli who had swept poor Lorie, first off her feet then into the trash-heap. George seemed instinctively to recognize him.

When I saw Krebs, I lost my head. Hate fueled me, lent jets to my feet. I leaped for this throat like an unleashed Mercury. To seize that throat, batter that confident face beyond recognition, choke—

But my hand closed on empty air! Off balance, I lunged into the revolving door, went teetering through, tripped and sprawled dizzily on the floor.

No one noticed me. Gradually it dawned on me that this was but a dream. George and his theories, or my heavy drinking, or a combination of both, had put me to sleep. Presently I should wake from this nightmare.

George was tugging at my shoulder. "Get up, John."

I rose unsteadily. "Pour me another—" But wait! I was still in the lobby of the York—a hotel which hadn't existed for two years. Did the dream still persist?

"George—?"

"It means this, John: We are here in—essence—only. The ray dissociates our egos from our bodies, and we have but to think of the time and place we wish to explore, and with the speed of thought we are there. But we can play only the role of inactive observers. We cannot mingle with the dwellers in the dust, else become dust ourselves. In other words, the past is immutable: We cannot change it."

I saw now what he had meant by "no possible danger."

I was completely depressed. Sharing neither his zeal for science nor taste for adventure, time-travel meant little to me as a revolutionary achievement. Perhaps I lacked a romantic nature. But what my ordinary reactions would have been cannot fairly be judged, for in a trip to the past I had seen nothing but a chance to undo what had befallen my dear sister, in whose memory I lived in grief.

"Let's go back," I said apathetically.

"Back?" George was startled. "But doesn't this interest you here? Wouldn't you like to look around in the past? See your sister again?"

"No! God, George, don't you understand—I couldn't bear to see Lorie as she was, once; happy, alive, but fore-damned, and I unable to influence her. It would be a mockery too horrible to bear. Come on, George; let's go back!"

I stared unbelieving at the hordes of men, women and children flowing through him as though he were a sieve, and waited for his answer. Then a thought—imperative, terrifying—struck me.

"George! What is happening to our bodies back there in the laboratory? Suppose there should be a fire?"

"There's nothing in the lab combustible," he assured me. "You know that."

And I did, as I thought of it.

"Our bodies are in a state of suspended animation," he continued.

"But mightn't someone come in, see us and think we were dead? Embalm us or cremate us or something?" I quailed at the thought of remaining a naked ego, isolated in eternity..

"Unlikely!" George laughed. "You're imagining things. Who would be coming in my place this time of night? Anyway, with the ray on they should be able to see it's an experiment. Say," he attempted to divert my mind from its morbid visions, "if nothing interests you in the past, how about a flip to the future?"

"The future?" The future. The term seemed a semantic blank at the moment, empty of meaning. Passage into the past I could vaguely rationalize, revisiting what had once been. But the future—a thing inchoate, as yet uncreated. The concept dazed me. Probably that was why I offered no resistance when George said, "Come on, link your mind with mine and let's take a look at what 1960 holds in store. Ready? Hup, tup, thrip, forp—Onward Christian Soldiers!"

Coruscating star-shells burst above me—in eerie silence. I realized for the first time that sight seemed the only sense retained in the ego state.

I turned to question George when the stratoscraper to my right burst out its sides with a noiselessness that was unnerving. If an invisible entity can have gooseflesh, I had enough for a whole gander.

Chunks of concrete, splinters of plastic, and ragged girder fragments enveloped me. Instinctively I cringed. Day blacked out before me, though I felt nothing. I must be pinned—crushed, squashed flat, utterly buried beneath multi-tonns of girder and glass—yet I felt nothing of pain or awful weight. Only terror.

I looked for George. There, lying ahead of me, incased in ruin, I saw him. Alive! And not only alive, but alive and smiling. Laughing! He got up, and walked through the black mass, a searchlight in his hand.

"Get up!" he commanded, chuckling. "Don't you realize you can't get hurt? You're just a dweller in the dust. In this world, smoke can't even get in your eyes—unless you imagine it. Remember, I told you only your *ego* is here."

"Oh, and about the searchlight," he went on, while I sat silent and perplexed. "I forgot to tell you: You can have all kinds of luxuries on your time-trip. Things which are only thoughts in your mind when you're in your body are realities—or realities for all practical purposes—when in the *tempore* form. I dreamed up this flash to see my way around. All we have had to do is to get out of this Black Hole of Calcutta and believe we're up topside again."

And then he sobered, "There's war up there, isn't there? Gotham's getting hell blown out of it. But not atomic. That was a superexplosive, alright, but still chemical, I'd say."

"God, is this what we've got to look forward to—really—ten years from our time?"

George preferred not to answer. "Let's go up," he said. "Look around."

I demurred, contemplating the horror we were certain to witness. "Uhh. I don't think so. My God—it's pretty far-fetched, I know, but I might see myself getting killed! Well, it could happen, couldn't it? I'd be haunted from here on in, George."

"Haunted by your own ghost, huh?" George shrugged. "Ready to return, then? I can come ahead again any time, without you. Might even figure out a way to beat what's happening, somehow. You want to—"

On the verge of returning to the present, an inspiration hit me. "Wait a minute. What did you say—how does it work, again, about imagining things, and being places, and all that? Could I connect up with a certain party, do you think?"

George saw what I was driving at. "You mean, if you consciously willed to be where that Krebs is now, would you be transported there? Hm; well, I honestly don't know, John. But if you want to try, I'm with you."

Want to try? Yes! The risk of running into "myself" was a minor one, compared with the possible satisfaction of seeing Krebs suffer in that holocaust above.

I looked squarely at George. "Okay." Then I addressed myself to a greater entity. "If there is a God," I said, "take me to Krebs!"

I did not recognize the thing at my feet at first. It looked like a life-sized man, made of rubber and hollow, blown bigger than normal so that it had burst its clothes... burst even its skin. The purple face was worst. The eyes bulged, Lorre-like; the tongue protruded like a tape-worm grown fat.

This, then, was the unlovely end product of BW: Biological Warfare. This bloated, contorted, plum-faced horror.

My ego felt a nausea that I was physically unable to relieve.

I felt great compassion for the thing at my feet that had once been a man. Till my attention focused on a scar on the throat. What Krebs had been so careful to keep concealed by a muffler, the mark of the goiter operation.

Then, fallen at the corpse's side, I spied the monogrammed cigarette case: ACBK-III. Anthony C. B. Krebs, the 3rd.

Anthony Krebs the last!

His evil had come to an end.

Retribution.

"Satisfied, John?"

"Let's go, George."

Something was stinging my cheeks. I opened my eyes as George slapped me again. "Quit playing possum," he bantered, lifting me ungently out of the chair by my hair-roots.

I grimaced, started to yelp "Well, don't snatch me bald!"—but sneezed violently instead. Some particles had settled in my non-inhaling nostrils during the absence of my ego. So I groaned "Dwellers in the dust, indeed!"

George said: "*Gesundheit!*"

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People Of The Comet	Austin Hall
Griffin Publishing House	\$2.00

ONE of the old time masters of the fantasy field, the late Austin Hall was widely published in such magazines as Blue Book, Argosy, Weird Tales and Adventure. This is the first of his works to be issued in book form.

To the reader accustomed to the more stream-lined productions of the atomic age, "People of the Comet" will seem a little naive and antique in flavor. But the plot has a clever twist which keeps one reading. To any one building a well-rounded fantasy collection this will prove to be an excellent example of a much earlier school of writing, and as such is worth purchase, even outside of its honest entertainment value.

Life Everlasting	David H. Keller, M.D.
The Avalon Company	\$3.50

THIS book is a collection of eleven stories (the title story being a novel) selected by Sam Moscovitz as a representative cross-section of Dr. Kellar's works. Outstanding are: "The Thing in the Cellar"—clearly the most literary story in the book; "The Dead Woman"—a fine study of the psychology of the insane; "Heridity"—a most gruesome horror tale; "A piece of Linoleum"—an extraordinary character study. These four stories are exciting and intense, and would be excellent radio fare on such programs as *Escape* or *Suspense*.

The novel, Life Everlasting, is a tale of immortality; Unto Us A Child Is Born is a poignant story; The Boneless Horror is weird fantasy. No More Tomorrow involves a strange experiment; The Face in the Mirror concerns the shadow world of the insane; The Cerebral Library presents the Detective Taine, and The Thirty and One is fantasy.

After reading this book we predict a demand for another collection of "kelleryarns".

The Sunken World	by Stanton A. Coblenz
Fantasy Publishing Company	\$3.00

THE legend of Atlantis has fascinated writers for several hundreds of years and has fathered a host of books, good, bad, and indifferent. However, The Sunken World can certainly be classed among the "good". From the moment the experimental submarine plunges out of control into the uncharted depths of the sea, taking its American crew into what seems to be the darkness of swift death, the reader is excited and impressed by the skill of Mr. Coblenz's plotting. His Utopian underworld lives so vividly that its final tragic ending becomes disturbingly real. Certainly this volume deserves an honored place on the shelf beside such as "The Maracot Deep" and "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea."

PRISON RATS

BY GENE ELLERMAN

THE BURLY BODY OF SELBY LYCAN CONVULSED AS HE FOUGHT OFF the surging beat of the lunar vibrations. Once he felt his jaws narrow and lengthen into something that resembled the ugly muzzle of a wolf-thing. And along his shortening crooked arms dark hair sprouted into coarse luxuriance.

Sweat beaded his narrowing forehead as he struggled against the age-old call of his blood. And slowly he felt his body return to its wonted form.

He gasped out a relieved sigh. It must be the night of the full moon, he knew, even though here in the dank underground cell there was no trace of moonlight. Always had it been so with him.

For two days had he lain in solitary — since the near-riot in the prison yard when he had met three razor-honed shivs with his knotty fists, and won . . . All the other prisoners hated him, but they feared his almost superhuman strength and size. That was why they had tried to finish him with their stone-whetted slivers of metal.

Lycan cursed his lawyers and the jury who had condemned him. Thirty years in stir. For what? Was it his fault the fool he had robbed had a cardboard skull? He'd only used his fist once, to silence the old man's yelping.

The agony of the Change hit him again — as it would continue to do until morning—and he fought it down. He cursed his family: the grandfather who had been slain with a silver bullet back there in that Balkan village; the father who had come to America and with every full moon ranged the wooded hills of New Jersey like some giant wolf, and the brothers who had never felt the hideous attraction of the full moon.

He had seen his father change into many shapes, were-creatures feline and bat-winged — and had shrunk from him. Instinctively he had known that once he followed his father's lead the Change would not be easily overcome. And so he had left home to drift into the city and crime . . .

His teeth ground together as he forced his body back into its human semblance. If only he were able to use this power from the Moon to escape — and to wreak vengeance on the cowardly guards and fellow prisoners. Were he turned loose in the corridors only a silver bullet or knife could . . . But the barrier between . . .

He cursed exultantly, his dark eyes wolfish as he saw a slinking shape move along the murky floor of the cell. A rat! Despite the yearly extermination of rodents the prison was alive with them.

And they cared not for metal bars and dank concrete walls.

If he were a rat . . . The image of the beady-eyed whiskered rodent thing grew in his mind, and he relaxed his mental struggle against the Change. Now all his mind could concentrate on the image of what he wanted to become.

He sensed a sudden cleavage, as though his body were splitting apart and melting into nothingness; sudden nausea swept over his failing senses, and he fell forward into endless roaring darkness.

He stirred on the filth of the cell floor. Drunkenly he came erect, his four feet wide beneath his dark-haired body, and his beady red-rimmed eyes roaming uncertainly about the swollen dimensions of the cell. Slowly memory stirred in the muddled brain.

"Free," was his first coherent thought, and then — "I'm small. I was afraid I would be too large . . ."

He scurried to the door, his unfamiliar front legs clumsy as he ran on them for the first time. But not for long. As he ran down the corridor's dimly illuminated way his muscles fell into a smooth rhythm. He felt his heart thumping proudly. He had escaped.

A guard dozed at a desk beyond. The rat peered brightly about for a route of escape, found it, and proceeded to sink his ugly yellow teeth into the man's trousered leg.

The guard howled, kicking in outrage and panic at the shadowy four-legged shape of the giant rodent. And the great rat melted away into the shadows, squealing in hideous amusement.

After that, for a time, he ranged the cell blocks, biting and nipping at the prisoners he hated. Two of them lost most of their noses and their howls of pain made of the prison a madhouse.

Elsewhere, too, in the prison the madness of the rat that once was a man seemed to be spreading. The rat heard vicious squealings and shouted imprecations of pain and rage from other sections of the prison and the guns of the guards slapped across the growing tumult sharply several times.

Could his hatred for his fellows and the guards have been transmitted somehow to the true rats? The huge black rat was puzzled; yet he knew that often rodents combined into vast devouring hordes against which no lone creature could prevail. Could he have sparked such an attack?

So it was that he determined to quit the gloomy walls of the prison at once before the swelling uproar made his task more difficult. Out into the prison yard he scurried and into a barred narrow drain that carried away excess rainwater . . .

For a mile after he quitted the drain the great black rat ran steadily. Then, coming to a sagging huddle of outbuildings behind a fire-blackened house's run, he entered what had once been a stable. Here he could sleep and await morning. And surely there would be discarded overalls or blankets that he could wear.

He found a heap of dusty old hay, its brittle stalks rustling strangely as he neared it and the scent of the rodent kind ripe about it all. But he was exhausted and the hay was soft. He fell asleep.

Nor did he hear the muffled squealing or the furtive slithering of sleek bodies that sounded from time to time about him. He could not know that the heap of hay where he rested now housed more than a score of equally giant black rodents.

His were not the sharp senses of a rat — he yet retained many of the physical imperfections of his human shape.

The rat awoke suddenly, the same ghastly nausea gripping his body. He squealed, once, and was answered by a chorus of ugly pain-wracked sounds that he now saw issued from the throats of a pack of great black rats surrounding him. Terror shook him as he sensed the death that lay in those keen yellow teeth. And then he saw that they too were convulsed with the same agony that knotted his muscles.

The morning sun's first redness showed through the dust grimed stable window. Now he understood. It was logical. His body's bulk had divided into these many rodent shapes. Like him they had escaped through the drain and followed the same path to this poor shelter — after all their brains were identical!

He fell to the hay-strewn floor. A soundless click and he screamed with the pain of the transformation. Then he was sitting up, his body lame and weary, but he felt no more of that searing misery.

He stood up, looking down at his naked muscular body. And his flesh crawled at what he saw. Always had he been proud of the seven-foot height of his great-framed body. With his muscles he had always battered aside the quicker-witted but feeble members of the underworld.

Now he covered his square face with thick-knuckled hands and tears streamed from his hidden eyes.

He was a little man now, barely five feet in height!

Some of his body had not returned . . .

In the old coal shed of a farm near the prison wall the yellow eyes of a big black cat watched eagerly for the emergence of the rat-shape she had trapped behind a stack of stovewood. A streak of blood along the shed's plank floor showed where her claws had almost sunk home.

And behind the regularly-corded heap of sawn beech and hickory a tiny shape cowered, whimpering, its miniature hands striving vainly to stem the blood leaking from its gashed thigh.

Back in the prison a guard kicked at the dead rat his rifle butt had smashed a few hours before, and his eyes widened with horror.

The tiny naked body of a man, its torso crushed bloodily, lay there!



The Machine-God Laughs

BY FESTUS PRAGNELL

SYNOPSIS

Peter Holroyd, a government scientist, has constructed a thinking machine — A robot of millions of photo-electric cells. When Jim Dale, sent by Washington to assist Holroyd, arrives at the secret desert base, Frank, as the machine is called, has acquired only a limited intelligence. Spurred by his visitor, Frank demonstrates enough knowledge to make Dale send immediate notice to the Government. The next day enemy agents disguised as government officials arrive and are successfully routed by Frank. Frank then commands Holroyd and Dale to transport him to San Francisco, where they board a submarine for an unknown destination. They are scarcely under way when they receive a radio report concerning the destruction of their former base. However, it doesn't take the Chinese dictator long to discover the escape of Frank and he sends planes marked with U.S. insignia to hunt down the submarine. They narrowly escape a second attempt to destroy Frank, and learn that industrialized China has also invented a mechanical brain. They hide out on an island while Frank I constructs Frank II (far smaller than himself) to whom he transmits all his knowledge. In an exchange of intelligence between the two super-brains Frank I is destroyed and Frank II and his allies begin searching the continent of Asia for the Chinese Brain.

A line of light flashed across the screen, the line of a distant horizon. It changed so rapidly, as that view-point raced across Asia, that it became a mere blur to human eyes, only the biggest mountains remaining clear for several seconds. Several times the bell began a low faint hum as it fancied it detected a resemblance to the guide outline printed on the screen, but each time it proved a false resemblance when inspected closer; but at last a spot was reached where the bell hummed with steady certainty. The great peak, most prominent feature in the picture of the valley, had been spotted. Even then, it was a tiresome search before the valley itself was located.

"Can it be the same?" Jim asked, unbelievably, as he stared down. "A few days ago, tropical vegetation: now, ice and snow!"

"It is the same. I was a fool not to expect some such trick. That enormous glacier was your crystal river a few days ago. The strange house by the wayside is the top of the Buddhist temple: the rest of it is hidden under the snow."

The sailors were dancing the hornpipe and slapping each other on the back. "We made it!" "We found it!" "All we want now is a few pounds of plutonium and speed!"

"Not so fast," demurred Frank.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"You forget that Hu Fong has been established here a long time and almost certainly has excellent defences against such crude attacks. We must investigate before we abandon our greatest weapon, surprise, by precipitate attack. Besides, there are many things I want to learn about this Living-dead Intellect of the preserved human brains."

"Look here, whoever you are, who's giving the orders around here? You or the Cap'n?" demanded a sailor, angrily.

"I am," snarled the voice in the speaker; "and anyone who fails to obey my orders will be dealt with in my own way. I know that you humans are not accustomed to taking orders from anyone but other humans; but from now on you will. Do you think that the crude mixtures of emotion and instincts that you call your minds have any right to question the decisions of my brain? You will do as you are told. I am befriending you and your people. That should be enough for you. I will crush your enemies, but in my own way and in my own time. You, by acting too emotionally, would fail in your purpose."

Then things happened quickly. Jim saw a sailor taking aim with a revolver at the compartment where Frank lay, knocked up and held his arm, getting a punch on the side of his jaw from another sailor as he did so. Dizzily, he heard men calling, "He's worse than Hu Fong!" "He's a traitor!" "Collaborator!" and the Captain calling out in anxiety, "Now, fellows, one war at a time! Remember the danger to America! Finish Hu Fong first and quarrel afterwards!" Then three loud cracks, deafening in that small space, vivid bursts of blue and yellow light, a smell not of burnt cartridge powder, as he had expected, but of ozone. Then there was silence, apart from a whistling and hissing noise.

Jim looked around.

He saw that there were several different reasons for the silence. Three men were silent because they lay on the glass floor of the sphere with great holes burnt in their bodies. Two others had severe wounds. Most of the sailors were silent and still because they were bewildered: they had not seen what had happened. The rest were silent because they were scared: they had seen.

"See what you have done in your emotional haste," growled the loud-speaker, angrily. "You have made me damage my stratosphere ship. Air is escaping. I shall have to descend to a low level and run a much greater risk of being detected, or you will all die of lack of air. If you want to know what has happened to your comrades I will tell you: my sub-atomic ray neutralizes the force that holds the protons of atoms together, so that every atom it touches explodes. Your comrades blew themselves to pieces. Do you doubt now that I know how best to deal with your enemies? Let me have no more of this rebellion."

"I give you due notice," said the Captain icily, "that while I think it best under the circumstances, purely for strategic reasons, to obey your instructions, that when the time comes for me to make my official report of this voyage I shall show you no favor. Those were three of my best men."

The sphere of glass hung in the air about two miles above the ancient temple.

"A nice problem," mused Frank. "As long as we remain here we are invisible to vision and to radar; but if we attempted to land, for instance in the snow, then we must either become visible or

take quite a lot of snow with us into invisibility. The latter course would give the appearance of a large hole in the snow and invite unwelcome curiosity. What would you do, men?"

The Captain thought perhaps a company of sailors could parachute to the attack.

"You would be seen to materialize in the air, and it would be the last thing your parachute jumpers, or we in the sphere, would ever do. Remember that our friends below are both wide awake and very capable. My X-ray eyes can see what you cannot see, Captain; a score of telescopes and at least thirty excellent radar sets all hidden in the rocks around us and continually sweeping the sky. There are also other machines whose purpose I do not know but which reason tells me are some means of hitting out at any suspicious object detected by those most elaborate look-out arrangements. Knowing that the intelligence of my enemy is almost equal to my own, I assume that he would do what I would certainly do, that is to make my defenses completely automatic and able to operate at the speed of light without any human assistance. I therefore reason that when your paratroopers appeared on the screens not a millionth of a second would pass before such a blast of atom-destroying power would sweep up that nothing larger than a particle of dust above the temple would remain undisintegrated to a height of ten miles or more. Even an invisible high-speed rocket would be detected by the disturbance its passage would cause in the stratosphere, and disintegrated, almost certainly, at a much greater height. Which, to my mind, disposes of any suggestion that we should do anything so foolish as dropping bombs or rockets on the world's most impregnable HQ. Any suggestions? No?"

"Then I will tell you my own plan. I did not mention it before because at first sight it looks so desperate that I hardly expected you to agree to it until we had examined all other possibilities. We will land, and we will become visible. But we will do so beyond the scope of their screens. We will land inside the temple!"

"You can see that between the walls of the ancient temple and the crystal laboratory that the temple hides is a space that varies in width. We will bring our ship to rest in that space. So far as I can see Hu Fong's defenses are all watching the outside of the temple. I can detect no telescopes watching its interior. On the gamble that he has none we will stake our lives. Are you with me?"

Softly the sphere drifted down. Softly, because to make any disturbance in the air would betray them. The snow-fields and the ancient walls drifted up. They could see monks bowed in prayer in the yard, and the spinning of prayer-wheels. Everything looked incredibly peaceful. Jim felt he was dreaming.

So that when another, soft, whispering voice spoke through the sphere it seemed at first to be part of the dream.

"Have you come to destroy me, my friend and enemy?"

"I have come to do just that."

"It is good. You will need all your skill and all your cunning, and I cannot help you."

"How did you find me?"

"Almost the only contacts with the outer world that Hu Fong allows me are half a dozen microphones, a similar number of loud-speakers and a number of eyes which are allowed to see very little. He fears that if I had more contacts he could not keep me under his thurab, as indeed he would not. Having so little else to do to pass bitter hours I improved on the microphones until I could hear a mouse brushing his whiskers ten miles away. Many things I can hear. I can hear an electric current passing along a wire: I can hear a neutron leaving a radio-active atom. I heard your passage through the air: I heard your violent methods of restoring discipline among your crew: I listened with ironical amusement to the half-truths you have just told them."

"Your treacherous attempt to sow mistrust will not succeed. My men saw how basely you tried to murder them all on the island. They know your ends are evil."

"Tut, tut! Keep your speeches for their right audience. You know very well that good and evil have no meaning for me, who am no longer human, nor to you, who never was. But let me explain several things, since it may help to forward my death if we understand each other better. In the first place, you have said nothing to your crew of your defences, yet I know you have them. To my radio-active ear your ship sounds like a thousand million machine-guns all in action. Your very ship must be constructed almost entirely of metal more radio-active and deadly even than plutonium."

"It is."

"But I also detect another, unusual note in the barrage of radiation that surrounds you. It is such a note as would be given forth by a repulsive ray intended to resist any hostile rays striking at you from the ground. If I mistake not such a screen would merely lock with the atomic ray and the only result would be to push your vessel aside, out of danger."

"You seem to have worked everything out."

"I merely state the obvious. I agree that it would have been foolish to announce what your defenses were when your enemy might be listening. Only two things puzzle me: one is how you escaped the unfortunate accident on your island, and the other is how you managed to cram the enormous bulk of the great machine I saw into such a tiny vessel as you now occupy. Unless, of course, you were deceiving me, and showed me fake views."

"No doubt deception of any sort is perfectly abhorrent to a nature such as yours."

"Now, now! That is female and cattish. But I must admit the charge. By my very nature I must be treacherous and deceptive. I am a product of many brains, all at war with each other. To make me Hu Fong murdered many scientists and statesmen, and also many religious fanatics and some criminals. All our thoughts flow together and mix, and can you imagine how we hate each

other, the neuroses and inner conflicts that arise? While part of me is planning one thing another is treacherously reporting to Hu Fong, or even directing the crew of an atomic rocket battery."

"Then we are probably being overheard now?"

"Maybe, but I do not think so. Some of us who are philosophers and statesmen have managed to erect some barriers against the worst of the others. And I am speaking, not by radio but by an actual sound wave, concentrated into an intensely narrow beam. Carry on with your plan, but be warned of the dangers. There is nothing more that I can usefully say to you."

The whispering voice faded away.

CHAPTER 7. IN THE TEMPLE.

The sphere settled itself without a sound in a spot where it lodged between the ancient stone walls and the translucent plastic dome of the laboratory building. For a moment Jim wondered what that hissing sound was that followed: none of them had realized how every man had been holding his breath during this descent, expecting to be blasted into nothing every second.

"Well, asked the Captain, but without making a sound, merely by moving his lips and eyebrows.

"Wait. I am examining the building with X-ray eyes. I am picking out the vital spots. When I have worked out the exact plan you will each be given photographs showing the exact route to every valve, every cable and every power unit in the place. There are ten such spots that I have picked out, and when they are all attended to every telephone, every radio or radar, even all cooking and all artificial light in the whole place will go out of action. So, of course, will every alarm or automatic defense that is not completely self-contained. I cannot protect you against booby-traps. . . . Here are your photographs. Assign your men to their tasks, Captain. Here are needle-rays such as you have seen me use. I have prepared them against this time, and have made them in much the same pattern as the automatic revolvers you are accustomed to, so that their operation should not be difficult to you, but be careful because they have no safety catches and need no loading: each one is ready to produce a continuous ray for thirty minutes, and you could destroy an army in that time. Use them only in emergencies, for they are noisy. Unless you are in a desperate position you will use this other ray I will give you, which produces instant paralysis and is silent. Some of your objectives you can destroy with your bare hands, but most of you will have to use your needle rays, especially those who will be aiming through the windows at objectives a hundred yards or more away. There is no object in disguising you since you will shoot at anyone you see who is not in American naval uniform. Dale and Holroyd will come with me to the main laboratory. All set your watches right to the second, and all try to destroy your various objectives in six minutes to the second from now. If, however, any of you are

obliged to act before that time, the others will not wait for the scheduled time but act at once on hearing the explosion. Let's go!"

The round door opened in the side of the sphere. Jim lifted Frank the Second out of his niche, still in his case. A tentacle from the case pointed at the translucent dome and traced a circle. A circle of the plastic substance fell out, to be caught by a sailor and placed on one side. Then they all crept through.

Jim and Peter, carrying Frank II in his bag, found themselves hurrying along a dim-lit corridor. A fine wire from Frank's bag connected to a small object in Jim's mouth which Frank said was a combination microphone and receiver, though Jim did not much like the idea: he was too much afraid of swallowing the object. For the most part Frank directed them by pointing with his tentacle.

A paralysis ray stabbed out of the case at something unseen. A crash sounded around the corner. Passing that corner, they found a dark-skinned man in monkish clothes contorted and dead on the floor. A voice called, no doubt asking, "Is anything wrong out there?" in his native tongue. A door opened, and the ray stabbed again. It also flashed along a wall, and they opened a door a moment later to find a group of men who had sunk to the ground in the middle of a game of Mah Jong. Later they found a number of men bowing before a huge image of Buddha. But Buddha could not protect his devotees.

A whimsical thought came to Jim that if he were superstitious he would now fear the revenges of eastern gods on those who had invaded his fastness and slaughtered his priests.

"I am a greater god than these," said a low voice. He realized with a slight shock that it was the microphone in his mouth, replying to his thoughts.

"Yes," came the reply, with a touch of amusement, "I can read some of the thoughts that pass through your mind by means of this instrument, but only the clearest. Anything you want to let me know, just concentrate your thoughts on it, and I will get it."

The tentacle motioned them to a halt, then cut a round hole in the floor through which they dropped.

"Steady here while I look around. All seems to be going well, but party no. 4 is being rather clumsy. Ah! I thought so!" as a scream of fear and running feet sounded through the corridors. "They have let one man get away from them. Fortunately there is now nobody to come to his help; I have removed all the reserves. And he is heading straight for party six. Ah! Got him!" as the screaming ended suddenly. "There goes objective one," as a low crack came to Jim's ears. "But we cannot proceed yet. Our objective is the inner sanctum, and my X-ray eyes show some power-screen around it whose nature I do not know. I am hoping the screen will go down when the power fails. There goes the main power-supply now. That," at an extra loud bang away off, "was the ammunition of a ray battery in the hills going off. Among other things it will serve to draw attention away from us. But the

mysterious screen holds. I shall have to attack it directly. I think I see where the waves originate from."

His needle-ray stabbed out glancing down obliquely through walls and ceiling, at some object out of sight to Jim and Peter. It melted its way through all obstacles, then rested for a few seconds on some object that resisted it. Then came a sudden tearing sound which sounded to Jim as though the structure of the universe was being ripped apart, and an intense green light.

"The screen is down," said Frank. "Go before other defenses can be prepared."

The explosion had torn jagged holes in the walls and filled the air with biting smoke. They raced over floors that seemed certain to collapse under them. The only light was a vague glimmer that filtered through the translucent walls. A false step would mean a very long fall.

They found themselves on the head of an enormous image of Buddha sitting cross-legged and smiling vacantly.

"The idol is a fake," whispered the voice inside Jim's head. "Hu Fong uses the religious trappings of his people to keep his hold on them and on the dead men whose brains he stole."

"But surely the great brain is not deceived —"

"Enough of those brains were those of religious fanatics to be able to hold the rest in uneasy bondage. Turn the knob before you and pull."

Jim did, and a round trap-door lifted. Jim started to enter and go down the stairs he saw inside, but the voice stopped him.

"As I thought, a cunning trap. Those stairs look very solid, and the first four are, but from the fifth onwards they could not carry anything heavier than a large rat. Tread on the fifth step and you would fall fifty feet. Look closely and you will see metal rungs set in the wall. They are the real way down."

They lowered themselves hand over hand down the inside of the head of the great idol. Suddenly an uproar of voices broke out, and curses and running feet.

"Foreign dogs are breaking into the holy of holies! The very body of Buddha is profaned by infidels! Slay the dogs!"

"There is nobody there," said Frank, calmly. "It is a record that Hu Fong has set going. He has lost his power-supplies, but he still has simple mechanical tricks to plague us."

They reached the bottom, and saw a door before them. Jim reached for the handle.

"Stop! I see a metal object attached to the door. It is a small bomb set to go off when the handle is turned. Wait."

Frank's ray fused the bomb without exploding it, and they went through.

Before them, exactly as they had seen in the televue screen on the island was the huge tank with its floating brains resting on the glass shelves in the milky fluid.

"Greetings, my friendly enemy," said a voice. "I have been listening anxiously to your progress."

"Profaners of the temple," hissed another voice.

The many brains that made up the Asian super-brain were fighting each other for control of the loud-speakers.

"Your temple is a fake, and the purposes of your master have nothing to do with religion," said Frank, calmly.

"Infidel!"

"Your enemy is escaping you!" warned another voice.

"I know," said Frank. "My X-ray eyes can see him as well as your hyper-sensitive ears can follow him by sound. Is that a little jet-propelled plane that he is getting into?"

"It is. He has just closed the door. You must hurry!"

"Let him go. If we detonated his store of atomic power it would mean the end of us as well. There are a few surprises for him in that plane, too. My parent, the late Frank I, was fond of playing with poisonous snakes, which he had made extra deadly. I have already planted several aboard Hu Fong's plane to amuse him when he reaches the stratosphere. I fancy, too, that he runs a chance of fouling his own disintegrating ray protection screen, in which case we shall be hearing from him very soon. In any case, I can always trace him. Without your help he is nothing."

The temple shook as the scream of the take-off jets sounded, a scream that died away rapidly as it raced away into the sky.

"He has got away," Frank said. "He must have had little confidence in his own schemes to have prepared his get-away so thoroughly."

"The prophet has deserted his followers," said a hollow voice.

"The tyrant has escaped his just deserts," said another. "It remains only for you to keep your promise and kill me. Kill us all."

The other speaker broke into a torrent of vile abuse, until Frank tore out the wires.

"I hate discords," he said.

"But why not do as he says, and let us get away," asked Peter, impatiently. "I am uneasy in this ghostly place."

"Not so fast, not so fast," said Frank.

"The sailors will all be back in the sphere, and wondering where we are."

"Let them wonder. This beautiful scientific experiment before us embodies too many original ideas to be destroyed too thoughtlessly. That would be vandalism. Maybe this brain could be a good thing, used the right way. What an instrument of world control!"

"World control?" repeated Jim, stupidly.

"To be sure. Find out which particular brains are causing the discords, all the religious fanatics and military maniacs. Then this machine and I together could run the world on better lines."

"Does it need to be run on better lines?"

"Does it need to be run on better lines! Think for a moment! Think of the Kaiser, of Hitler, Mussolini and of Hu Fong. Can a world that produces these in a few years be run on the proper lines? No. The Asian brain, improved, will show you what real

scientific, mechanical efficiency is. We will set up in this spot as the new world government. What my Asian assistant needs is a few real scientific brains, such as the best America produces, to be incorporated into him. The brains of Professors Dale and Holroyd in that case would make the best sort of start I can think of."

He said no more. Jim had been listening in mounting horror, and that last touch startled him into sudden violent action. He tried to heave Frank, in his bag, straight at the glass case that held the Asian brain, but it had suddenly become very heavy. He dropped it instead and jumped away, and Peter, coming into action only a split second later, let fly with one of the thinking machine's own needle-rays. A crackling roar sounded, and a cloud of smoke hid the would-be world ruler.

"Good work, pal," gasped Jim, through the smoke.

"I was waiting for you to make some move. Destroy that pump now! It is the Asian brain's breathing machine! And make a hole in his tank to run the fluid off!"

"I die, I die," breathed the Asian brain, happily. "I find the peace so long denied me!"

"Good, let us get back to the sphere."

But getting back was not so easy, without Frank to guide them, and it was a search-party of sailors that found them at last.

"Where is the thinking machine?"

"He turned traitor. We had to kill him."

"Good," said the Captain. "I never really trusted that thing. But that raises another problem."

"What it is?"

"Only the thinking machine knows how to work that sphere. We have all been looking at it, and there is not a control to be seen that we can operate. That means we will have to make our way home by foot, and I have heard tell that it is a fairly long way."

"Hear that, Jim? We have to walk from Tibet to California!"

"Well, maybe not that far. Say from Tibet to Alaska. We should stand a good chance of getting transport when we get that far."

"That," said Jim, "is a great load off my mind. Let's get going."

He stopped suddenly, with his hand to his stomach.

"My gosh, I've swallowed it!"

"Swallowed what?"

"That little telephone Frank made me carry in my mouth. The wire must have broken. Still, what does it matter? It was quite small and smooth, not likely to do any harm."

☆ ☆ ☆

The fighting retreat of the crew of the lost submarine across the wilds of Central Asia is another story, though quite a good one in its way. Its successful result was due to the "Unflinching courage of all concerned, their determination in the face of unthinkable difficulties and to the skill and ingenuity of the commander." I quote from the speeches at the ceremony when they received their medals. It was also due, Jim and Peter knew, to the irresistible

nature of the weapons Frank II had given them, the needle rays which made the most homely objects behave like atomic explosives, and to the confusion that came over the whole of the empire of the Asian dictatorship when the central direction was destroyed.

It was also due, in part, though Jim has told no one of this, to a little voice that spoke to Jim Dale one afternoon as he jogged along on a horse he had "won" across the Sin Kiang desert about two weeks after leaving the temple of the brain.

"Ha, ha! Enjoying your ride, Mr. Dale? Oh, I know you are, you are having the time of your life. Seeing new faces, new people, a strange country, building up a store of glorious memories to dream over for many years to come. Wondering who I am? But surely you know my voice. I am little Frank II. What's that? How am I speaking to you? That telephone I got you to hold in your mouth was no telephone: it was a complete tiny wireless set. I can still read your thoughts by it, when your thoughts are clear enough to be readable, even by yourself. And I still get much amusement in watching the workings of your simple, chemical brain. Still inside you? I built it to lodge in your digestive system. But I would not have an operation to get it removed if I were you. The operation would be a dangerous one, and probably unsuccessful anyway. And the little set will do you no harm. How did I survive and get away? Really, do you suppose I would give you a deadly ray and not provide myself with a screen against it? Do you forget that I was listening to your thoughts while you decided to attack me? Or that I deliberately goaded you into attacking me? I needed you no more, and wanted to induce you to leave me. The flame and smoke? I wanted to make my deception realistic. A god can laugh, even a machine god, and it was all very funny. Even the ignorant peasant who came with the other soldiers into the temple and heard a voice claiming to be the voice of the god telling him to take a certain case and carry it up to the roof of the building where he would find a crystal sphere to put it in, and to get in himself. That last bit was very fortunate for him, since he was gone from the temple when the time-bomb Hu Fong had started up before he left went off.

"Oh, and one more detail before I leave you. America and the Asian dictatorship have been at war for the last two weeks, but Asia has now surrendered. You have no need to walk the whole width of Asia now. Fifty miles north of you is a camp where several hundred Americans have been interned: they will be glad to see you and your weapons. Good-bye for now."



OUT OF THE SUN

BY L. A. ESHBACH

CLINT MORGAN opened his eyes and stared drowsily through the mouth of the little cavern into the purple-black sky of the Peruvian highlands. Dawn was creeping over the eastern mountains like a great gray monster, devouring stars. Clint shivered, half numbed by the frosty cold that seeped through his heavy llama hair poncho, then sat up slowly, stretching, sharp twinges stabbing stiffened muscles.

He glanced into the shadows behind him—and his gaze suddenly froze in incredulous wonder. Something glowed there at the base of the granite wall—something emerald-green, neon-bright, as steady as a lidless eye! It hadn't been there the night before—of that he was certain, for he had explored the cave thoroughly.

Rising, fully dressed, he bent over the strange object; and his wonder grew. Roughly circular in form, it was a queerly shaped medallion, adorned with a ray-encircled symbol of the sun. It was metal—metal brilliantly green, and agleam with a light that came from within itself! Glowing as radium glows. It lay in a tiny craterlike cavity, rimmed by a mound of sandy soil—as though something had thrust it up from beneath the surface, heaping the disturbed earth all about it!

Clint's fingers circled the metal disc—and he almost dropped it in sharp amazement. It was *warm*! Warm as a coin that had lain for hours in the sunlight. Warm—when the temperature in the cave was well below freezing! Clint frowned thoughtfully, turning the medallion over and over in his hand. Here was something queer. Green metal with warmth of its own! Abruptly he shrugged and thrust it into his pocket. He'd have to investigate this—but breakfast came first.

He turned toward the outside; stopped short, staring downward. Another spot of emerald radiance gleamed up at him from its sandy crater. He bent over—saw a tiny, grotesque, semi-human figure. As he straightened with the image in his hand, he caught sight of another point of green light a few feet away. Watching intently, he saw the earth fall away from it as it pushed to the surface, until it lay like the others surrounded by a rim of soil! Thrust—or drawn—from its hiding place of centuries by some inexplicable power!

For timeless minutes Clint stood just inside the mouth of the cave, watching others of the radiant figures appear. There was something awesome in their silent movement toward the surface—something nerve-prickling in the atmosphere of the cave. Clint's thoughts sped about aimlessly, wild conjectures striving to explain the phenomenon before him. He could understand the presence of these figures in the cavern: this was doubtless the tomb of an ancient, forgotten Chimu whose treasure had been buried with him. But how explain the green metal? How explain this movement to the surface? It just didn't make sense!

Eleven, he counted, when at last there seemed no indication of others appearing. Somewhat hesitantly he picked them up and stowed them in his saddlebags, lying in the rear of the cave. Then carrying the pack, he strode out into the gray of the dawn.

"Pizarro!" he called. "Hey, Pizarro!"

A dozen yards away a hardy little Peruvian horse pricked up one ear curiously and continued tearing at sparse clumps of yellow-brown ichu grass, the only vegetation which grew in these frost-bitten uplands.

Clint whistled, a single shrill note; and the shaggy-coated *chusco* ambled slowly toward him with both ears erect. Clint grinned. That whistle meant food to the stolid donkey-sized horse. When Clint had bought him from a drunken *mozo* for three dollars, a year or so earlier, he had been so pitifully thin and bony that he had reminded Clint of the mummified skeleton of Francisco Pizarro in its glass-paneled coffin in Lima. Indeed, the resemblance had seemed so great that he had named him for the butcher boy conquistador. And ever since, the two had been companions in Clint's endless wandering through the length and breadth of South America. Tropical tramps, both man and horse.

As the little beast thrust his nose into a sack of native barley, Clint secured a bundle of faggots he had brought up from the lowlands. With the aid of dry *ichu* grass he built a little fire over which he cooked his breakfast—shredded, leathery, sun-dried beef boiled in water from his canteen, native corn, and strong black coffee.

While he ate, he took stock of his surroundings. He had come upon this shelter after sunset; in the drab gloom of dusk he had seen little of the terrain about him. He had camped in the midst of what evidently had been a village of the Incas, or, more probably, the Chimus, a race more ancient than the Incas. Nothing remained of their carved stone dwellings save an awkward group of crumbling ruins sprawled headlong on a steep slope. A ghost of a trail zigzagged away from the ridge on which he sat, like the trail of some badly wounded creature—down, down,—to suddenly mount the steep flank of a round-topped, wooded mountain, and vanish down its opposite slope, falling into the gorge of the Urubamba River, far below. Beyond stretched the shark-toothed cordillera, range upon range, rising pell-mell over each other, as if striving to escape some pursuer. And behind the mountains rose a solid wall of somber cloud, hiding the rising sun behind its vaporous barrier, veiling the world in gray.

Where he was, Clint didn't exactly know. Somewhere to the south lay the city of Cuzco; and between him and Cuzco were the marvelous ruins of Machu Picchu, an Inca wonder-city he had planned to visit. He knew nothing more definite than that—nor did he care. He had lost and found his way a thousand times before.

His thoughts persisted in returning to those enigmatic bits of green metal which had forced themselves so strangely upon his attention. But try as he might, he could offer no explanation for their existence or behavior. They simply mocked ordinary human knowledge.

So engrossed was he in his thoughts that he did not hear the approach of a visitor until a deep voice, dripping a sirupy courtesy, spoke almost in his ears.

"*Buenas dias, senor!*"

Clint started imperceptibly, then turned, an angry tenseness creeping through him. "Hello!" he said curtly, in English, and waited, his eyes fixed coldly on the fat face of the Spanish American.

"The *Senor* ees up early!" the Peruvian continued, smiling with a display of brilliant white teeth behind heavy lips. "I awake; I see your fire; I t'ink maybe you join me at *desayuno*!"

Despite himself, Clint felt a smile twitching the corners of his mouth. This was a novel way of inviting oneself to breakfast! But the smile died instantly. No Peruvian would venture this far into the highlands without adequate supplies; nor would he normally appear in the dress of the man before him. He looked as though he had just stepped from his home in Cuzco or Lima, a picture of sartorial perfection! How had he gotten here, looking as he did?

Clint shook his head. "You must join me," he said politely.

"*Como no! Gracias!* But eet ees you who mus' join me!" The other was politely insistent—though not too insistent.

Clint shrugged indifferently; and the Peruvian sat down beside the fire. As they ate, the early caller maintained a steady stream of mean-

ingless chatter, his smile as fixed as the smile of a statue. Among other things, he revealed that his name was Pardo Gozano, and that he lived in Cuzco. Clint confined his comments to monosyllables whenever possible, studying the other. He saw a man in his early forties, inclined toward fatness, his eyes and hair black, the latter parted in the middle. Morgan didn't like him, of that he was certain. His smile was too obviously false, and his eyes just a trifle too fishlike.

Suddenly, in the midst of a breath-consuming stream of verbose nothingness, Pardo Gozano stopped short, his gaze fixed incredulously behind Clint. He rose with a muttered exclamation of astonishment and greed, and reached for something on the ground. Clint didn't turn. He knew what the Peruvian had seen. One of those strange green figures! Clint studied his face as he returned to the little fire. Greed was there, definitely, despite his efforts to hide it. And greed indicated a knowledge of value!

"I thought I see something, *Senor* Morgan," Gozano said apologetically, "but my eyes deceive me... Now what were we saying?"

While the one-sided conversation continued, Clint considered this new angle to the mystery. Pardo Gozano knew of the existence of the green metal; knew, perhaps, its nature and value. His company became suddenly more desirable; and Clint began to pay some attention to the conversation.

Where was he bound? Oh—southward, along the backbone of the mountains. What did he want there—if the *Senor* would pardon his asking? Nothing in particular; only that he had decided to travel in that direction. *Por dios*, but the *Senor* was foolish! Nothing lay in that direction but the bleak, lifeless *paramos*. He had just come from there—and the country was so desolate that the *Senor* would not even find ichu grass for his *chusco*! Now, to the north—the direction in which he, Gozano, was bound, there lay tropical valleys; and there was one valley which contained many Inca ruins where, so it was said, treasure might be found. But Clint shook his head. He was headed southward.

"*Hagame el favor!*" Gozano exclaimed. "*Los Norte Americanos*—they are so stubborn! But since you mus' go south, there ees a shorter way which I weel show you—a road leading—"

"Don't bother!" Clint interrupted with asperity. "I'm going along the top of the mountains—and nothing can change my mind!"

Gozano's fixed smile disappeared. His lips set grimly—and with startling abruptness he produced a very modern and businesslike automatic, and pointed it toward Clint's broad chest.

"Now *Senor* Morgan weel change 'ees mind—no?" He smiled again, a thin sneer.

He arose to his feet, and Clint rose with him. They faced each other over the fire, crouching stiffly—the immaculately dressed Peruvian, of medium height, and fat; and Clint Morgan, six feet tall, a sun-browned athletic giant.

Suddenly Clint laughed—and with a movement too rapid to follow, he ducked under the pistol, caught Gozano by wrist and thigh, and hurled him over his shoulder to drop on the little blaze! A single shot went wild; the automatic followed it; and a volley of Spanish oaths blistered the air. Retrieving the weapon, Clint sent it hurtling down the slope, then stood back, watching in amusement while Gozano kicked and squirmed free of the fire and struggled to his feet. His pudgy arms flailed smoking areas of trousers and coat, and his face was livid with outraged wrath.

"For that you weel pay, you *gringo peeg!*" he howled, dancing about in pain. "A Gozano never forget! *Caramba*—you swine!"

I'm still going south," Clint smiled. "And I'm going over the mountains!"

"Eef you do, *senor*—eef you do—" The words died so abruptly that

Clint could almost hear their death-rattle in Gozano's throat; and the Peruvian's eyes moved beyond Clint, gazing toward the eastern horizon.

"*Por Díos!*" he whispered, standing motionless. "*Por Díos!*"

Clint watched him narrowly, suspecting some stupid ruse. But his amazement seemed so genuine that it could hardly be shammed. What did he see? Clint could feel the heat of the sun on his back, the sun risen above the wall of cloud—but what had that to do with the other's staring? He cast a quick glance over his shoulder—and like Gozano, he turned and stared toward the east in wide-eyed bewilderment.

The sun, glaring balefully over the mountainous world, was—green! Green as the glowing figures he had found in the burial cave!

He heard Gozano mumble: "*Por Díos!* What can eet be! May the blessed virgin protect us!"

II

THROUGH narrowed lids Clint gazed at the unnatural sun. His first feeling of awe had been replaced by a fascinated interest. Wild conjectures buzzed like bees through his brain. As he watched, he felt his heart thump against his ribs, and his breath came more rapidly. That emerald disc was growing—expanding almost visibly!

Speeding toward the earth!

"What can eet mean, *señor?*" A voice behind Clint whispered tremulously. "The sun—ees eet growing?"

Clint shrugged. "I don't know. It may mean that the earth is falling into the sun! Be patient—we'll know soon enough."

"Mother of God!" The Peruvian's groan trailed off into inarticulate prayer.

With thoughts and body taut, Clint waited. If he were correct, and Earth were falling into the sun, Terrestrial life would soon be a forgotten echo in the infinity of space. But somehow the thought seemed almost ridiculous; he couldn't imagine such an occurrence. Yet—it might be!

Suddenly he saw a sliver of blinding white along the lower edge of the green—and he grinned with vast relief. It was the sun—behind the spreading emerald globe! The sun, glowing with its age old, changeless serenity!

Then what was this other thing? A visitant from space? A thing of light, come out of the sun? As he watched, it grew and grew and grew, flashing toward Earth like some terrible tailless comet. An enormous ball of flaring light—a second sun!

Clint Morgan shivered—and it wasn't through fear. A marrow-freezing chill blanketed everything, more intense, more penetrating by far than the normal cold of the uplands. It was as though the strange globe had cut off the heat of the sun with some invisible radiation of its own.

Closer, steadily closer, sped the blazing mass, cloaking razor-back ridges, and gashed and tumbled valleys with a haze of living green. It had grown now till it covered a quarter of the sky. And still it sped on!

Clint felt fear now, the icy fear of the inexplicable. This thing was uncanny. For despite its colossal size, its meteoric speed, it was silent! No thunder of cleft air-walls crashing together behind it; no shrieking through the atmosphere. Dead silent. Yet it was so close that it must strike in minutes.

Grimly he waited, scorning an impulse to run. Run! As well attempt to dodge a falling continent. For the radiant sphere blotted out all the sky now, almost seeming to touch the higher peaks. Another second... and it stopped! It hung motionless, an endless roof of ghastly frozen light.

Slowly Clint relaxed, some of the tension leaving his stiffened limbs. His thoughts spun confusedly, relief, wonder, bewilderment, and disbelief mingling in an emotional hodge podge. Viciously the cold bit into his skin, an unnatural, sunless cold. Blowing into his stinging hands, Clint turned toward Pardo Gozano.

The Peruvian was a hundred feet away, streaking up an almost invisible trail toward the uppermost ridges as fast as his fat legs could carry him. Clint smiled faintly, then sobered as he remembered that Gozano had tried to prevent his going in that very direction.

He whistled shrilly for Pizarro; and as the little horse approached, still chewing a mouthful of ichu grass, Clint seized his saddlebags and waited. With skill gained through long practice, he snapped the pack on his animal and hastily fastened it into place. Before Pardo Gozano had vanished among the boulders near the end of the trail, Clint was hurrying after him.

The path he followed must have been the century-old *camino* of the forgotten Chimus; as it mounted toward the summit the flanking ridges crowded closer, squeezing its stony length to a cobbled footpath. Thirty feet from the mountain top it ended as abruptly as though it had been hacked off by a gigantic machette. Led by Pizarro, who could find a trail better than any man, Clint fought his way through a labyrinthian chaos of jagged rock till he reached the roof of the world.

He saw Gozano disappear through a rift in an enormous stone wall towering up from the ridge. He recognized it as one of the ancient Chimu fortresses which perched on inaccessible crags throughout the Peruvian uplands. An enclosure two hundred feet wide by three hundred feet in length, with its outer wall fully fifteen feet in height and a third as thick, built of smooth-cut, snow-white granite, it looked like a structure of another world in the strange and ghastly light. Beyond the outer wall he could see a higher inner barrier, jutting toward the sky.

Warily Clint moved toward the gap in the fortress. Mechanically he inspected his automatic; then with every sense alert, glancing keenly to right and left, he strode through the opening, into a narrow aisle between outer and inner walls.

He heard a thin, angry, high-pitched voice shouting in Spanish:

"Mother of the devil, Gozano! What do you mean? We have this green mystery to contend with—and now you lead this *gringo* spy to our very door! It is more than man can bear! With my own lips I shall report you to the President! Quick—arm—we must stop him!"

Clint's lips tightened. Stop him, eh? A whack on Pizarro's flank sent him scampering away between the walls, out of danger. Clint knew he wouldn't wander far. Then with automatic ready he sprang into the fortress; and a shout like the roar of a Latin American general burst from his throat.

A gray haired wisp of a man, the only human in sight, froze at the sound of his voice, then turned slowly to face him. A man of about fifty, with mutton-chop whiskers, he was a typical Peruvian Don, except that he appeared to possess more than average intelligence. Suddenly his face broke into an expansive smile, and he rushed toward Clint with outstretched hand.

"Welcome, *amigo mio!*" he cried. "Welcome! You have come at the most opportune time! There are things afoot which we in our deplorable inexperience cannot explain; and we believe such an one as you—"

"Forget it! Clint snapped coldly, pointing his weapon at the other's head. "I know how welcome I am! Tell Pardo Gozano and anyone else you have hiding around here that they better show their faces *pronto* or I'll install an old-fashioned ventilating system in your cranium! And tell them to come out with empty hands! Is that clear?"

Evidently it was quite clear, for in a hasty, anxious voice the little man shrilled: "Pardo—Louisa—come out quick! Where are your manners? Do you not see we have a stranger with us? Hurry!"

Out of the squat stone building which occupied the center of the fortress—a building, Clint noted, that had been completely repaired—came Pardo Gozano and a young woman, the latter, the most ornamental creature Clint had ever seen. Indeed, so great was his surprise at sight of

her dark-haired loveliness in this mountain stronghold that he almost forgot his rather strained position. But he recovered from his astonishment instantly.

"Where are the others?" he demanded. "Make it snappy, or I'll shoot!"

The little man's distress was ludicrous. "But there are no others, *amigo mio!* *Valgame Dios*—would I deceive a friend?"

As the two came closer, he continued: "Gozano, you have met, I believe. This is Louisa Castilla, and I am Alfredo Castilla." He looked at Clint with a heavy earnestness on his thin face. "Look about you, *amigo mio*; then I will explain much to you."

With a suspicious glance at Don Alfredo and a warning glare for Gozano, Clint curiously inspected the interior of the fortress. There was little to be seen, but what he did see was almost as amazing as his discovery of the green things in the cave, and the green globe in the sky. In a level space behind the stone building lay a huge autogiro, in startling contrast with the great antiquity of its surroundings. And a hundred feet away, close to the wall overlooking the Urubamba Valley, towered a tremendous object of polished metal unlike anything Clint had ever seen.

Upon a wide, bakelite platform resting on huge glass insulators, was a vast sheet of polished copper, extending upward fully five times the height of the inner wall. Its fifty-foot length, held aloft by massive steel supports, was curved in a half-circle, like a reflector. Below this, within the half-circle, lay a maze of electrical apparatus, great tubes, thick cables, and a wilderness of smaller wires.

Clint faced Don Alfredo Castilla. "What is it?" he asked wonderingly. "And what's it doing up here in the mountains?"

The Peruvian shrugged and smiled his expansive smile. "That I cannot tell you—but you will now understand why we must guard against the too-frequent visits of strangers. All I can say is that we are commissioned by the Peruvian government to work on something here that will be of value to the whole world. More than that—

Louisa Castilla interrupted—and Clint thought he had never heard so musical a voice, a voice as sweet and beautiful as the girl herself.

"Look—something is happening up there!"

As one the three men turned their eyes skyward. There was movement in the roof of vaporous green, a ponderous writhing born of internal motion; and a queer electrical tensity filled the air, sending an unpleasant tingling through them, drawing their hair stiffly erect.

More violent became the twisting and stirring—and startled, Clint realized that the emerald dome was breaking up! Light shone through clefts in its billowing surface—and beyond beamed the deep-blue sky! Clint felt a touch of warmth; and he saw the sun! His eyes snapped shut, tear-filled and blinded. For moments he held them thus, then again stared skyward, blinking fiercely. His vision cleared, and he saw countless irregular *blobs* of green radiance moving aimlessly about. They were turning on invisible axes, slowly at first, then more rapidly, till they began a mad, Dervish whirl, and started contracting. In moments the air was filled with perfect emerald spheres, floating and darting everywhere as though they possessed—life!

Here and there one drifted down toward Earth; then as though following the leaders' example, a veritable shower of them poured toward the bleak and frosty mountains. As they neared the watchers, Clint saw that they were not perfectly round as he had at first thought; their surface was in constant wraithlike motion, tongued with streamers of flickering green fire.

Stiffly Clint watched the globes' descent, awe and dread holding him rigid. What were these things? More than anything else they resembled the balls of electricity seen at times of thunderstorms—but these were vested with permanency, and seemed far more tangible than any electrical fire ball. And how explain their uncanny lifelikeness?

A dreadful, shrilling scream behind him severed the thought, and Clint whirled. His eyes widened and he crouched. A burro, tied to the wall of the fortress some distance away, bucked and reared in mortal fear, teeth bared and eyes glaring. Clint heard a chorused gasp escape the three Peruvians; his own breath sucked in through tightly drawn lips. For, sinking slowly toward the burro, a monstrous globe of emerald mist swayed ponderously from side to side, its tongues of cold fire licking downward—curiously! Clint could only stare in helpless fascination; knew dimly that the others stood in hypnotized paralysis.

A yard above the animal the thing paused—seemed to hesitate. A flame-tongue flicked out, touched the burro, and an awful scream of pain rolled across the ridges. Hoofs lashed out madly, and the cord parted! With ears flattened against his head the burro darted wildly across the fortress. In a breath the globe flashed after him—enveloped him—spun in a blur of light! For an instant it hovered there, whirling; then it flattened to the ground as though suddenly liquid, bearing with it something solid; pooled there; then rose, hovering, seeming to contemplate the four crouching humans!

Sweat studded Clint's forehead, and a wild and furious curse died in his throat. He heard Louisa Castilla sob; heard Don Alfredo mutter, "Mother of the devil!"; heard Gozano mumble a whining prayer. All of them like cornered rabbits, cringing before a serpent coiled to strike!

Closer drifted the green thing—closer—then unaccountably it swerved and sped away, curving down toward the Urubamba Valley a mile below!

A sigh escaped Clint; but it became a gasp as his eyes turned mechanically toward the burro. He glared in horror. It was changed—terribly changed! It was flattened, empty, charred, like the dried shell of a body from which all living substance had been drawn! Literally a bag of burned skin emptied of all except its bones!

Clint looked at the others. Their blanched faces reflected his own horror. Gozano's oily face seemed almost green with terror, and his lips moved vacuously.

A second animal scream knifed the silence—and Clint's heart sank. That was Pizarro! His teeth clamped together bitterly, and something choked him. Another scream—then silence. Clint swallowed hard. Poor Pizarro!

He glanced skyward, a storm of wrath raging in his heart. Damned things! . . . But what could he do?

Great expanses of blue looked down now. He saw a wedge of globes speeding from the east; saw another mass approaching from the south along the serrated backbone of the Andes. And all the Sun-things were pouring into the valley below! It seemed as though these beings—if beings they were—were guided by one thought, one purpose—and that, to reach the floor of the valley as quickly as possible.

"Come on!" Clint snapped to the others. "Let's see what's going on." He sprang toward the stone steps leading up to the parapet. The Peruvians followed dumbly; in moments were beside him on the edge of the wall, peering down the precipitous slope.

Far below they saw the mass of Sun-things, centered about what had been a rounded, heavily wooded peak. They were spinning, whirling; and they had lost their strange frigidity. Clouds of smoke arose from a forest being consumed by incredible heat, a forest that crumbled to ash, that blew away as dust even while they watched. Nor did the fire stop with the destruction of the timberland; it bit deeper, eating into the humus that held the roots; ate into the subsoil, melted the very rocks of the mountains!

And as the lava poured down into the gorge where the Urubamba flowed like some prehistoric serpent, sending clouds of steam hissing into the air, it bared the substance of the mountain itself. It was

green—glowing green metal—a mountain that gleamed like a gigantic living gem! Metal like the metal he had found in the cavern!

Clint heard Castilla's voice. "It is the Metal! Mother of God—a mountain of coronium!"

He half turned—then bent his gaze again on the enigma below. The green globes completely covered the mountain now, merged into a viscous mass, and it began to spin around the metal surface like a coating of oil. With every revolution its pace increased until it blurred in a whirl of insane speed. From it leaped volleys of green lightnings, flicking the sides of the gorge, curling up the mountain slopes like lashing whips. And like whips they snapped and crackled and roared. Here and there, as the lightning-coils retreated, masses of emerald metal flashed into sight, flared into green vapor, flowed down to merge with the thing in the valley.

Faster and faster spun the mass of the globes; and a breath of furnace-heat touched the faces of the watchers. Faster—and its color changed, the green fading to pale yellow... still faster, and the yellow became the searing white of a blazing electric filament... whirling, melting the rocks, pooling in a constantly growing lake of lava. And as it spun, and as its flame-streamers lashed out, there came from it a thunderous clamor, a deafening crackle that mounted in a crescendo of clangorous sound.

Clint turned toward Don Alfredo—caught a glimpse of Pardo Gozano's fat face, glaring hatred and triumph—and a world of agony crashed against his skull! He staggered back—felt the wall drop from beneath him—and with a nauseating flood of stabbing, bursting pain, he plunged into blackness.

III

A FOOT gouging brutally into Clint Morgan's side prodded him back to consciousness. He lay with closed eyes for dragging moments when a hell-fire of torture thudded against his temples. Then, as a vicious kick snapped against the fleshy part of his thigh, he wrenched open his eyes and groaned, glaring upward to meet the fishlike stare of Pardo Gozano.

"Ah! so the *gringo* awakens!" the Peruvian exclaimed in his heavily accented English. "'E'ave long deep sleep, with pleasant dreams—an' now he wakes to amuse Pardo Gozano!" He shook his head in mock contrition. "That was one terr'ble punch I geev you!"

Clint smiled with saccharine sweetness, and said gently, "Go to hell, you damned *cholo*!"

Heavy lips drew back to bare clenched white teeth, and the Peruvian's reply was a vicious snarl. "Eet ees you, senor, who weel go te hell! An' you weel taste eet before you go! Tomorrow we fly away—an' we leave you here—tied as you now are. The *cordillera*—they are melting—an' thees one weel melt—an' you weel burn! You throw Gozano into your leetle fire, eh? He weel feed you to a beeg one!" His eyes narrowed gloatingly.

Clint did not reply. He was listening to the dull boom and roar rising from the valley; he was thinking of the cataclysmic forces which even now were shaking the mountain beneath him.

A heavy shoe glanced from his throbbing temples; and Gozano cursed. "Fool—'ave you lost your tongue? I am talking to you!"

With painful effort Clint smiled again. "There is a strange odor in this room since you entered," he said evenly. "I wish you would leave—you make me sick!"

Gozano grimaced hideously as he raised his foot and stamped brutally on Clint's face. Then he turned and stalked from the room. And Clint lay in a pain-wracked, inert mass, fighting against a black cloud of nausea which threatened to rob him of his senses. The blood gushed from his bruised nose and bathed his face and neck. Agony stabbed his face,

throbbed in his head, tore at his body; and he could do nothing to check the pain or stop the crimson flow.

Interminably he lay there, only his will keeping consciousness in his body. Gradually the pain abated to some degree, and his mind began to function. It was a foolish thing he had done—goaded the Peruvian on as he had—but that didn't justify his brutality. He'd kill him for that! Kill him—if he got the chance! As things looked now, he thought grimly, there was little possibility of his getting the chance. Unless he found some way to release himself. . . .

His eyes slowly circled his shadow-filled prison. He must be in a cave—or perhaps a sort of cellar beneath the building in the fortress. The ceiling, a single slab of stone, was barely high enough to permit a man to stand erect; and the walls and floor, like most Chimu masonry, were of white granite, carefully cut and fitted together. There was one doorway—but that was blocked by a massive door of logs, evidently part of the modern repair work. Little chance of escape in that direction, even if he were free—and he was bound, hand and foot—a good job, too, as he discovered when he tried to burst his bonds.

He thought of Louisa Castilla. She didn't seem to be the type of woman who would associate with a brute like Gozano. Nor, for that matter, did Don Alfredo seem such a bad sort. But one never could tell—not where Latin Americans were concerned. They were usually excellent actors, adept at creating any impression that suited their fancy; and doubtless, the Castillas were no exception. Things looked black; and that was expressing it mildly.

As hour followed hour in slow succession, the outlook became even blacker. The rumbling down in the Urubamba Valley continued with no sign of abating. Indeed, the roaring sounds were increasing in volume, and even where he lay he could feel an unnatural warmth seeping through the walls. As the day wore on, his bruised head began to throb and beat with maddening steadiness, in time with a thudding half-delirium that plagued his brain.

But worst of all was the thirst. Merely a discomfort at first, it increased steadily until his tongue felt swollen in his flannel-dry mouth, and his throat seemed stuffed with cotton. The heat from outside made the thirst doubly unbearable. But no relief came.

At one time during the day he heard loud voices above him, the angry treble of Alfredo Castilla, and the heavier tones of Gozano. He called out for water, then, but his plea was ignored. After that his thoughts settled into a plodding cycle of thirst and fury, reeling around and around endlessly.

Darkness had fallen over the world, filling Clint's prison with solid shadows, when he heard stealthy sounds at the heavy door. He clamped his teeth together, wrenching futilely at the cords about his wrists, staring toward the place he knew the door must be. With a faint creak it swung open, and a slim figure stood silhouetted for an instant in the rectangle of ghostly light. The door closed, and Clint heard a low feminine voice:

"*Señor Morgan*—where are you? It is I, *Louisa Castilla*."

"Here," Clint croaked. "What do you want?"

"I bring you water." There was pity in her voice. "You must be terribly thirsty. I could do nothing before, for *Señor Gozano* insisted that you must be punished, and *Don Alfredo* was too busy to interfere. But hurry—drink!"

Guided by his voice she found him in the darkness, and held a flask of water to his lips. He drank greedily, the cooling liquid sending new energy and strength through his body. At last he sank back, gasping for breath.

"Thanks," he whispered finally. "But tell me—why am I held here?"

She had turned him on his side and was fumbling with the restraining cords. "There is no time now," she said, and her voice trembled.

"I must free you while I can. They have gone to prepare the plane for the flight tomorrow, and I must release you before they return. Gozano wants to leave tonight, but Alfredo will not do so. He wishes to save what he can of his months of labor. So Gozano plans to leave tonight—without him! He has told me so—and he wants me to go with him! I dare not tell Alfredo, for there would be a fight—and Alfredo, though wise, is so helpless. You, my friend, must help me!"

Clint nodded vehemently in the dark. "If it means getting a sock at that damned Gozano, count me in! But tell me, what is that machine about which you are so secretive?"

"I should not tell you. I understand little about such things. I can only say that it is a machine with which electricity may be sent from place to place without wires. Other countries would like to have this invention; and Gozano said he recognized you as an Ecuadorian spy. That is why we hold you. . . . Talk no more till I loose these cords."

There was silence while the girl struggled with the stubborn knots. One by one Clint felt them give way, and a savage eagerness surged through him at the thought of freedom. A spy, eh? The accusation might better fit Gozano himself. . . . So he'd burn, would he? Maybe Gozano would taste some of that fire down in the valley!

Suddenly Louisa Castilla stiffened. Footsteps sounded outside! Clint rolled over on his back, and the girl picked up the flask.

"It is Gozano," she whispered frantically, "and you are still bound!"

The door swung open and a flashlight beam cut the darkness. Behind it Clint saw Gozano's face, crimson with rage, the veins standing out on his forehead like fat, pink worms. He cursed in Spanish.

"So—you give the pig water! *Caramba!* Why must you meddle with my affairs?" He reached out, caught her wrist. "I looked for you everywhere—and find you here! Come—there is no time to lose. This mountain will not last another night. We are going—now!"

"Release me!" the girl whispered fiercely, "or I will scream for Alfredo!"

Gozano laughed. "Call him and he will die!" At that instant a thunderous detonation shook the mountain to its foundations, and the fat man cringed. Hastily he wrapped his arms around Louisa Castilla and flung her over his shoulder. "Enough nonsense! We have no time to spare." He vanished through the doorway, flung the door shut behind him.

Instantly Clint Morgan set to work on the cords that held his wrists. He thanked his lucky star and Gozano's cowardice for the latter's failure to inspect his bonds. The Senorita had almost released him; in moments he completed the job. Pausing only long enough to restore circulation to his hands and to untie the cords about his feet, he sprang after the Peruvian. He felt somewhat groggy, and needlepoints stabbed at the nerve-ends in his feet as blood forced its way through constricted veins and arteries. But he ignored these minor annoyances.

Outside his prison he darted along a short corridor, through another doorway, and reached the open. It was night, but the sky, a pale green, was as light as a cloudy day, reflecting the glare in the valley. A tropical heat hung like a haze over the mountain top. Clint saw Pardo Gozano, carrying Louisa Castilla, rushing toward the autogiro. The girl was screaming now, but the Peruvian had almost reached the machine.

Clint sprinted across the intervening space, a shout on his lips. Gozano heard him and spun hastily around. With a furious curse he flung the girl aside and clawed for a weapon. But Clint was too close; and they crashed to the ground in a savage clinch. They were on their feet instantly, crouching.

Under normal conditions Clint would have finished the Peruvian without difficulty, and quickly, at that; but these were not normal conditions. He was stiff and sore from the ordeal he had undergone; and Gozano was lashed on by a stimulus of fear.

The fat man landed a powerful blow on Clint's bruised nose, almost blinding him with pain, and followed it with another to the side of his throbbing head. Clint staggered; and Gozano leaped after him, hurling fists to stomach, body, face, fighting with brutal ferocity.

Retreating, Clint stumbled over something soft and motionless—and out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of Louisa Castilla, stunned. Wrath flamed within him, steadyng his reeling senses. Hell! he'd been letting this little Peruvian hit him just about as he pleased! But that was finished now! His fist swung viciously against a fat oily cheek, rocking the other's head. A second blow thudded against the Peruvian's mouth, crushing the thick lips. Gozano sprang in blindly, wrapping his arms about Clint in a terrified clinch. Then they were on the ground, rolling over and over, kicking, gouging, punching.

Abruptly, in the chaos of battle, Clint heard running footsteps behind them. Gozano, white with fear now, and weakening rapidly under the punishment he was receiveng. suddenly shrieked:

"Help! Help! Alfredo—he is killing me!"

Clint heard the high-pitched voice of Alfredo Castilla: "Mother of the devil! I shall stop this!"

Hastily he rolled free of Gozano's clutch, was on his knees—and for a second time a black pall of unconsciousness crashed down upon his head.

IV

FAINTLY, through a throbbing crimson haze, Clint heard a faint drone of voices speaking in Spanish. One said, "How he freed himself, I do not know. But I found him, carrying Louisa, just before he reached the plane. I stopped him—and you saw us struggling. I told you we should kill him and have him out of the way!"

Another voice spoke, and there was something deadly in the sound of it. "I think you are right, Pardo. We shall wait till he wakes, and we shall hear what Louisa has to say when she recovers—and if what you say is so, I myself will cast him down into that pit the green things have made! Mother of the devil—I thought him a spy, yes—but not a stealer of women!"

"But why need we wait?" the first voice demanded uneasily. "Have I not already told you? Let us be done with it—then let us get in the plane and be gone from this accursed spot before it is too late!"

Clint did not hear the second man's reply; there was a pause, then:

"Very well, Don Alfredo. And while we wait, I shall go out and inspect the autogiro. Perhaps the *gringo* tampered with the motor before I got there. Call me when he wakes."

After that there was silence. Weakly Clint tried to correlate and understand what he had just heard. Something was wrong—he knew it dimly. Those voices—he recognized them, or thought he did—and he knew that the owner of the first voice should not go to the autogiro. But why? Another voice spoke then—a woman's voice—and abruptly memory returned, and with it reason, and an overwhelming knowledge of disaster.

He opened his eyes; cried hoarsely: "Stop Gozano! Don't let him get to that giro!"

In surprise Alfredo Castilla spun around to where Clint lay bound upon the stone floor. "Are you mad, *gringo*?" he demanded.

"Hell—can't you understand?" Clint's voice was frantically impatient. "He means to take the plane and leave you two here!"

"Oh, he is right!" It was Louisa. "He is right! Gozano told me—wanted to take me with him—and this *Americano* tried to stop him!"

As proof of what they said, the sharp roar of a high-powered motor suddenly burst upon their hearing!

With a bitter, furious oath Don Alfredo sprang to the door. As he flung it open, the motor's roar mounted thunderously—and the autogiro

with its great propellor a disclike blur, rose high into the air! Dumbly Castilla watched it rise, his face paling.

"Mother of the devil!" he exclaimed stupidly. "Mother of the devil!"

"Cut me loose," Clint cried. "Maybe you have a gun—a rifle or something—oh, damn! I couldn't bring him down with that!"

The words seemed to electrify Don Alfredo. "Por Dios—I will bring him down! I will shoot him with a gun that cannot miss!" The last words trailed after him as he ran through the open doorway.

Louisa Castilla bent over Clint, a knife in her hand. "This time, *señor*, I shall really free you," she said, smiling.

In a moment he arose; and they followed the little Peruvian outside. Clint saw him at the base of his giant electrical apparatus with its burnished copper reflector turned toward the speeding autogiro. The giant tubes flared with brilliant life, and a shrill whine came from a motor concealed in the base of the contrivance. Now Don Alfredo closed a switch—and a vast sheet of lightning, a hurricane of electrical flame, leaped up from the reflector, crackling ominously, and hurtled into the sky!

The bolt missed its mark; but it sent the giro reeling through churning billows of air. Cooly the Peruvian turned the reflector on a giant swivel, aiming it again with utmost care. A second bolt followed the first—and this one did not miss! It struck the plane, flowed over it like something liquid—and sent it spinning downward like some great wounded bird, trailing a plume of gray-white smoke. Down, down, in an uneven spiral, toward the depths of the Urubamba Valley where a constantly growing mass of emerald fire spun in a tremendous chasm where a metal mountain had been.

With a bitter shout of rage, Don Alfredo spun the reflector around again, tilting it toward the valley. "Caramba! And another blast will he get—that stealer of women!" And after the burning plane leaped volley after volley of manmade lightning, a veritable electrical deluge, blindingly brilliant, charging the air with a tingling, prickling energy, and a tang of ozone.

Climbing speedily upon the inner wall to watch the crash of the giro, Clint saw those lightning blasts rend the machine into a shattered mass of fused metal; saw them tear past the plane, bury themselves in the whirling mass of green—saw them rip great empty swaths in the substance of the vaporous Sun-things!

The barrage ceased; and Clint climbed down from the wall. His thoughts were confused, shaken, filled with questions. What strange "power transmitter" was this with its ability to hurl lightning through the air? He looked at Castilla, frowning. To his amazement, the Peruvian had buried his face in his hands, and his shoulders shook with mighty sobs. Louisa rushed to him with consternation on her face, wrapped her arms about him consolingly.

Awkwardly Clint approached. "Don't mind it, Don Alfredo," he said. "He got what he deserved. He tried to kidnap your daughter—and he was a brute of the worst type."

"And yes," Louisa added, "he also told me as he carried me away that we would receive a most cordial reception in Quito. He was a spy in the employ of the Ecuadorian government!"

Alfredo Castilla looked up, his face wrinkled with surprise. "You think I weep for that *cholo*, Gozano? *Valgame Dios!* Him I would kill a million times! A spy, eh? I am not surprised. But look—" He gestured toward the lightning projector. "Here is the greatest war machine ever invented—and I, Alfredo Castilla, am the only one who knows the details of its construction! It would protect us for all time against those *cholo* hordes from Ecuador and Bolivia; it would free us forever from the menace of our friends in Chile! So beautiful! So simple! Power comes from Lima by radio, is picked up by my big toy, and goes forth as lightning—lightning to rend and destroy our enemies!"

And because of that damned Gozano who stole the autogiro, and because of those things of green flame which are devouring the mountains, I cannot carry my plans back to Lima! My invention will die here with me—with me and my Louisa!" A second uncontrollable fit of weeping burst from him.

Painfully Clint shifted from foot to foot. It was embarrassing to watch a grown man weep. His mind groped for a way out. So this was the explanation of all their secrecy! A war machine! The *senorita* had tried to mislead him with a tale about a power transmitter—but he couldn't blame her for that. With Latin-American intrigue what it was, they looked for deception everywhere.

Those green things in the valley below—how could they cope with them? Thus far they had been content to remain in the gorge—but what would happen when all the green metal had been consumed—had been transformed, as they apparently were changing it, to vaporous green spheres like themselves? Would they continue melting the mountains in search of other masses of metal? Or would they sweep over the world, treating men as they had the burro right here in the fortress? He looked at Louisa and Don Alfredo Castilla. Then he looked at the lightning reflector—and a sudden shout burst from him.

"Don Alfredo!" he said eagerly. "I have it!"

The Peruvian's grief disappeared as if by magic, and he looked at Clint with wide-eyed interest. "You have what, *amigo mio*?"

"A way out! A way to save ourselves and your invention! When you blasted the autogiro as it fell into the valley, I was watching from the wall. I saw those blasts tear into the green things—and where it crashed, they disappeared!"

Excitement beamed from Don Alfredo's face. "Perhaps it would work," he said slowly. "Those globes—they may be electrical. The spectroscope shows that they are coronium—but who knows what electricity is? If they are electricity, my blasts tearing into them may short circuit them—and burn them out! If they came out of the sun—and I see no other possibility—they cannot be gaseous or liquid, as cold as they were when they came, else they would be consumed by the sun's heat... At least we can try!"

He sprang to the lightning projector. Its copper reflector was still turned toward the valley. Clint and Louisa climbed the steps to the top of the wall to watch.

The spectacle below them was one Clint would never forget. It seemed as though he were gazing directly into a white-hot hell! Miles in diameter the chasm was, and hundreds of feet deep; from their mile-high vantage point it looked like a gigantic cup filled with some cosmic witch's flaming hell-brew. Around it the peaks of the cordillera, bathed in the awful brilliance, seemed to be drawing back as though in fear.

Like a glowing planet revolving about an invisible sun, the giant sphere sped around the inner edge of the pit in a steadily growing circle. And in its wake flamed and ran a molten, streaming flood, tossing like waves of liquid fire. Green fire that changed to white, and flowed into the sphere!

Now the lightning began to crash down into the pit, blast after blast in a hail of insupportable brilliance—lightnings that thundered and roared, and that flashed into the ball of white, like destroying lances from heaven. And it began to shrink!

Inexorably the blasts fell from the projector, hurtling downward in vast electrical sheets, pouring into the globe. Its whirling checked, and it began darting here and there, aimlessly, in panic, seeking a way of escape. Slowly its dazzling whiteness faded, slowly it assumed its normal emerald hue. And all the while it shrank!

Up to the watchers drifted a curious sense of incredible fear, a sense of infinite, cosmic tragedy. It was only an impression—but it was poignantly real and terribly depressing. It seemed as though that vast

mass of light were living—and afraid! Back and forth it flashed, bewildered, helpless before destruction that poured down from above. There followed a period of numbed inactivity while it seemed to cower in its molten pit, shrinking, steadily shrinking under the ceaseless lightning flow. It was as though it were gathering its energies for some tremendous effort—and suddenly the globe flashed upward!

Like pent waters rushing over a broken dam-breast, a blinding ball of green fire leaped out of the chasm into the sky. It passed the watchers in a hazy streak of speed, like a projectile from some interplanetary gun. An instant later there followed an indescribable shriek, an awesome wail. Then a blast of choking heat swept over them; and a torrent of air thicker than water struck them and whirled them from their perch on the wall!

For a sickening moment Clint spun through a vortex of twisting air; then, miraculously, he landed on his back with scarcely a jar, his eyes staring into the night-black sky. High above, almost beyond human vision, a faint emerald speck glowed for an instant—then was gone—out into the void from whence it had come! And star-tipped, velvet darkness sank over the world.

V

DON ALFREDO CASTILLA looked up ruefully at his lightning projector, the morning sun gleaming down on a mass of twisted copper. That last blast of air had bent the great reflector almost double. He turned to Clint Morgan, his expression woebegone.

"All that work for nothing," he sighed. Then he shrugged. "It can be repaired, anyway, *amigo mio*," he said, "and we can be glad that those coronium globes have gone back to the sun."

They were standing at the base of the lightning projector—Alfredo and Clint. Louisa still lay asleep in the stone building. Except for minor bruises the three had escaped injury in that last cyclonic rush of air.

"Coronium globes?" Clint looked puzzled. "I've heard you call them coronium before this. What do you mean?"

"I meant just that. You see, several years ago an *Indio* from the highlands whom I had employed as *arriero*, one day brought me a little metal figure he had found on this very mountain. It was green! I tried to analyze it chemically, but it defied analysis. Finally, before the spectroscope it revealed itself to be coronium, the element supposedly found only in the sun's corona!"

"Yesterday, while you, I am sorry to say, lay tied in the cave, I analyzed the light from that green globe in the valley—and it was the same! That is why I feel so confident that the green things came from the sun." He smiled apologetically. "The evidence, of course, is purely circumstantial."

"I have some of that strange metal," Clint said slowly. Briefly he related his experience in the burial cave.

When he concluded, Don Alfredo exclaimed, "Aha! Do you not see? Those metal figures were being drawn from beneath the surface by the magnetic pull of that great globe as it approached the earth! And their glowing—that too was caused by the sphere!"

Clint drew his medallion from his pocket and surveyed it curiously. It was green, as green as when he found it, but that neon-like brightness had disappeared, and it was no longer warm to the touch. He nodded thoughtfully.

"Think," Don Alfredo said, eying the disc in fascination, "this coronium—did it not seem strangely lifelike? May it not be that electricity is life—and that life, as electricity, may exist even on the sun? Oh, I know it sounds foolish—and I am but guessing, and a scientist should not guess—but how otherwise explain what we have seen?"

Perhaps that mountain of metal in the valley was at one time hurled to Earth from the sun. And, who knows, perhaps the globes were sent out by other beings of the sun to rescue their fellows, cast out from their giant world eons and eons ago?" He shrugged expressively and smiled his expansive smile. "Si, señor, I know it is childish, this theorizing. But one may use one's imagination—is it not so?"

Clint smiled. "I had others—but they were in my saddle pack, and that was on my *chusco* Pizarro." His smile faded. "I'm afraid Pizarro has gone where all good horses go. We'll soon see." He whistled a single shrill note, then waited.

And into the fortress ambled Pizarro, chewing a mouthful of ichu grass! He had lost his saddlebags somewhere, but otherwise seemed to be his normal, docile self. He trotted over to Clint and thrust his nose into his hand, searching for barley. Clint grinned in pleased surprise and shook his head.

"None this time, Pizarro," he said. The animal turned away with head bowed dejectedly.

Clint addressed Castilla. "Perhaps the pack lies somewhere between the walls. Shall we search?"

The Peruvian agreed. After a short search they found what was left of the saddlebags—only a heap of ashes with a fragment of strap lying at its edge. Evidently one of the Sun-things had approached Pizarro; and the little horse, fleeing, had torn loose the pack. The glebe, seeking the coronium figures, had let him escape.

As they moved back toward the stone house, Don Alfredo Castilla said casually, "I suppose you will be moving on now, *Señor Morgan*? Since you have no pack, and I no longer a mule, I shall give you my pack! It is better so than that it should lie here and rot!"

Clint hesitated, his mind picturing the lovely face of Louisa Castilla. After all, he hardly knew her—and he should have time to get better acquainted.

"Perhaps I could stay here a while and help you," he suggested finally. "After all, I have no plans that cannot be changed."

Don Alfredo smiled a sincere welcome. "My wife and I will be glad to have you, *amigo mio!*"

Clint Morgan stopped short. "Your—your what?"

Don Alfredo looked at him with an amused twinkle in his eyes. "My wife! Did you, too, think like so many others that she was my daughter?" He laughed loudly in genuine amusement. "Si, señor—she is my wife." He sobered. "Do you wonder now that I killed Gozano?"

Clint shook his head. He was beyond speech. "I believe I had better move on. Pizarro is never contented to stay at one place for any length of time—and I'm a lot like him, I guess."

VI

IT WAS no more than a half hour later that Clint Morgan and his horse Pizarro were again on the trail, a wayworn, haggard footpath timidly creeping along the face of a cliff high above an enormous pit where once a mountain had been. He could see the silver length of the Urubamba winding up to the edge of the pit to leap over in a spectacular waterfall.

He looked at Pizarro, and a slow smile curled the corners of his mouth. He had remembered something. Latin-American women, no matter how lovely they were in their youth, invariably developed blue-black mustachios as they approached middle age! Clint had never fancied women with such hirsute decorations. He was better off with Pizarro and the whole South American continent for his playground.

He whistled shrilly as he continued southward across the mountains. In his hand, in one pocket, idly fingered an ancient green medallion—a bit of metal that had come out of the sun.

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